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THE REFLECTIONS OF A MARRIED MAN

By ROBERT GRANT



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THE REFLECTIONS OF A MARRIED MAN

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BY
ROBERT GRANT

WITH AN ETCHING BY W. H. HYDE

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NOTES



THE REFLECTIONS OF A MARRIED MAN

I

WHEN a man of thirty-five is happily, blissfully married, the scope of his reflections is necessarily limited.

Owing to the circumstance that he is a husband and a father, many questions which used to occupy and agitate his mental faculties have been dismissed or solved. He is no longer haunted by the face of every pretty girl he meets, for he has already met the woman most fitted in the wide world to make him happy ; and consequently all the cobwebs of cogitation concerning love which were wont alternately to exalt and depress his spirit as a single-man, have been swept from his brain. He is no longer prone to dreams

about the object of his affections, for he has her perpetually beside him, nor is he tempted to indulge in hyperbole as to what he would do and dare at her bidding, seeing that her bidding has now become his.

Analogously, he has dismissed as impracticable certain picturesque visions regarding his future which he had long entertained and kept in reserve in the secret places of his soul, to be acted upon under stress of circumstances. How often has he comforted himself, in moments of desolation, with the consciousness that if matters went too much awry he had merely to pack his portmanteau and start east, west, north or south in search of glory and adventure ! He has jubilantly pictured himself a cow-boy snatching a splendid bride from the awful waves of a prairie fire ; a conductor in a strange city working his way from the platform of a horse-car to the chief magistracy of a nation ; a leader into the light of countless hordes, fascinated at first by the swathe of his sword, and later by his counsel ; or a primitive forest-dweller, unhampered by clothes or codes, rearing a dusky race cheek

by jowl with nature. He has many a time quivered at the thought of how he would be able to bestow, from the summit of his majesty or his independence, kindly yet contemptuous condescension on the associates of his early days who had failed to recognize his superiority. But these are bygone fancies. So far from becoming a cow-boy, or a satrap, or the President of the Republic, or a billionaire, or a bushman, he has reconciled himself to the idea of plodding along in a rut at home, unillumined even by the hope of stopping a runaway horse. With the consciousness of the mortgage on his little house fresh in mind, and the prospect of a larger family staring him in the face, he recognizes that the chances are against his ever seeing an ostrich farm or a dance of dervishes, and that he may thank his lucky stars if, after ten years of toil, he gets away for a flying trip to Japan by way of the Yosemite.

In other words, he has become a fixture ; part and parcel of his own environment, and hopelessly entangled with the butcher, the baker, the candlestick-maker, the plumber,

the school-teacher, the physician, and the clergyman. Instead of speculating as to whether one would rather love or be loved, he is likely now, in odd moments, to be wondering whether the languidness of baby may not be due to the presence of arsenic in the wall-paper, or crooning over the quarterly bill of his family for boots and shoes. The world has become for him, to all intents and purposes, the community in which he lives, with its hopes, its ambitions, its aspirations, its foibles, its idiosyncrasies, and its crazes.

I occupy a modest establishment in that portion of the city where people take daily baths, do not use the blade of the knife in order to convey food to the mouth, and drink tea from a cup in preference to a saucer. In a republic, where everyone is the peer of everybody else, one cannot be too careful what one says in order to avoid giving offence. In our neighborhood the husband and father who is able to bring up a family on an annual income of fifteen hundred dollars, and lay up money into the bargain, is not to be found ; nor is the wife and mother who is able to pro-

vide for seventy-five cents, according to those marvellous bills of fare we see in the newspapers, a dinner which begins with raw oysters, includes soup, fish, an entrée, and a joint, and concludes with pudding, fruit, and coffee. Consequently I am obliged to earn an income larger considerably than the sum I have referred to, and although our repasts ordinarily lack fifty per cent. of the delicacies enumerated, I have noticed that on the first of every month my wife is apt to look as if she were going to cry, even if she has self-control enough not to.

I have read somewhere—it may have been in an electric car—that 500,000,000 of the world's population clothe the entire person, 700,000,000 wear more or less clothing, and 250,000,000 wear absolutely nothing. Had I been born in Timbuctoo, what would have been my destiny? The answer is far to seek; but it is irksome to the spirit at times to contrast the simple conditions of primitive man with the complex necessities of a highly civilized household. Given an adobe hut, a canoe, a bow and arrows, a fig-leaf, a pipe,

and a string of beads, what does the most fastidious savage lack ? As regards butcher's bills, traps against sewer-gas, the telephone, ball-dresses, electric light, private theatricals, and Christian Science, his mind is a complete blank.

When Josephine and I were about to begin housekeeping, she confided to me one evening that we should need only one servant. While I was pondering the matter in silence she continued, with plaintive earnestness :

“We shall really be able to manage perfectly well, Fred ; I have thought it all out. I will wash the breakfast things myself, and dust the drawing-room and cut the vegetables on the days the girl has to wash and iron. And then once a fortnight we might have in a scrubbing woman for half a day.”

I frowned majestically, revolting at the vision of my Josephine's dainty fingers dallying with a mop or intimately associated with potato-skins and pea-pods. In her mother's house she had been waited upon by inches all her days.

“I will have nothing of the sort, Josephine. I do not wish my wife to make a slave of herself. We must have as many servants as are necessary to do the work.”

Josephine sighed and clasped her hands. “How generous you are, Fred! We couldn’t possibly require more than two under any consideration. I heard of two girls to-day who would do capitally for us if you really think we can afford it. They are sisters.”

If I live to be a hundred, I shall never forget the attractive picture which those sisters presented when I saw them for the first time, a fortnight later, on my return from our wedding journey. We had come back a day sooner than we had expected, and we found them seated on the carpet in the centre of the drawing-room, busily engaged in burnishing a number of crystal pendants belonging to the chandelier, and as they looked up beamingly on our approach, it seemed to me that our domestic comfort was assured for years. They were both of buxom, sturdy physique. Delia, the elder, who was to cook for us and

do part of the washing, had a firm, honest countenance which was itself a guaranty that there would be neither waste nor pilfering below stairs. Mary Ann, the second girl, as I was instructed to speak of her, was of a more yielding type, a mild-eyed, dimpled, good-humored-looking woman, whose smile suggested willingness to oblige to the last gasp. She was to do the remainder of the washing, tend table, dust and sweep, take care of the rooms, and make herself generally useful to her sister and to Josephine.

“Aren’t they lovely?” whispered my darling to me on our way upstairs; and when we were within the privacy of our chamber she flung her arms about my neck and proceeded to expatiate exuberantly on our rare good fortune in having acquired two such treasures. Had she not many a time heard her mother declare that friction in the kitchen was the bane of domestic happiness? There could be none between sisters. They would work side by side in perfect accord, each helping the other.

For a month everything went more than

smoothly. Delia's bread and pastry were so light and appetizing that I was never once tempted to make invidious comparisons between them and those which my mother used to provide, so that Josephine's somewhat pallid cheeks grew rosy from sheer delight at my content. Nor was our second girl less satisfactory in her sphere. Although everything in the house was brand new, she broke nothing except a vase in the drawing-room which we both cordially detested, and which had been suffered to figure as an ornament merely out of consideration for the dear friend who had given it to us as a wedding present. But Mary Ann could not have shown more genuine contrition had it been of Satsuma. Accosting her mistress with tears in her eyes and the pieces in her apron, she confessed frankly that she had switched it from the table with her skirt, instead of maintaining that it "broke itself," and begged to be allowed to replace it by a rebate in her wages.

"It made me feel positively wicked," said Josephine, "to see her feel so badly, and to be conscious all the time that I was thankful

it was smashed, and that my only fear was we might be able to glue it."

Exemplary Mary Ann ! She used to call me in the morning punctually to a minute, and fold my trousers as accurately as a valet, and never once during her incumbency did my darling, in passing her fingers over the plush furniture in the drawing-room, discover dust.

It dawned upon me one day that Mary Ann was a changed being. Instead of going about her work with a light-hearted smile which found vent at times, when she was at a respectful distance, in the snatches of a song, she had become moping and dejected. When I asked her one day for a fresh towel, I observed, while taking it from her through a crack of the bath-room door, that there were tears in her eyes.

"Have you noticed Mary Ann, my dear?" I asked my wife, at the first opportunity. "She has something on her mind."

Josephine nodded, and I perceived that she herself was in a melancholy mood. "I knew it was too perfect to last," she murmured.

"What is the matter?"

“I haven’t the least idea, Fred ; I have refrained from asking in order to put off the evil day as long as possible, but I have felt in my bones for the past week that we were walking over a volcano. I might have known it could not last.”

“Pooh !” I answered. “You take the matter altogether too seriously, my dear. Mary Ann and her young man have probably had a falling out—that is all.”

Josephine looked incredulous. The next day, when I returned home from down-town, I found her sitting limp and doleful on the sofa.

“Oh, Fred,” she exclaimed, as I entered the room, “Delia is going.”

“Delia ? You mean Mary Ann.”

“I mean Delia, Fred.”

“What in thunder—” I began, but I was interrupted by the opening of a door behind me.

“Please, ma’am, may I say a word to you ?”

It was our second girl, the picture of dejection, with her handkerchief to her eyes.

“What is it, Mary Ann?” said my wife, with a touch of tartness unusual to her.

“Please, ma’am, since Delia is going I must go too.”

Josephine gave a gasp. “Go because Delia is going?”

“Yes, ma’am. She is my sister, you know.”

“But it is because she ill-treated you that she is going. You said that she had been cruel to you, and I remonstrated with her, and she said she would not stay. And now you, on whose account she is leaving us, come and tell me that you are going too. What do you mean, Mary Ann?”

“Yes, ma’am,” said the treasure, with a convulsive sob. “We came together and we must go together.”

“You cannot go, Mary Ann.”

I saw my wife really angry for the first time since I had known her, and I interposed with masculine gruffness.

“What is all this nonsense, Mary Ann, about your going and Delia’s going? You will both of you stay, of course.”

“She told me this morning,” burst out Josephine, indignantly, “that her sister had cruelly maltreated her ever since they had been here, and that she was very unhappy. And, Fred, I went down into the kitchen to speak to Delia about it, and Delia said that she wished to go at once.”

“She went, sir, just before I came up the stairs.”

Josephine gave another gasp.

“Well, then, what more do you wish, Mary Ann?” I said. “If your sister has gone, you have nothing to complain of, so back to your work.”

She shook her head mournfully and answered slowly, while she mopped her streaming eyes, “She was my own sister, sir, but she was that cruel to me that I couldn’t have lived in the house with her another day. And I’ve no word of complaint to speak against you, sir, or your lady. But if Delia’s gone I can’t stay. We came together and we must go together.”

And she went.



II

AS I was saying, we began our house-keeping with two servants. When baby came and the monthly nurse was on the eve of departure, Josephine spoke of the necessity of a third. We had at this time a cook and second girl who were not even distantly related, and though our bread did not seem to me equal to that to which I had been accustomed as a boy, and articles to which we were attached "broke themselves" from day to day, we were tolerably comfortable.

I was brute enough to inquire nonchalantly why the second girl could not tend baby. Let me add, in my own behalf, that this was just after the judge had directed a verdict for the defendant in a big accident case which I

had brought for an impecunious client, who had lost a leg, against a rich corporation.

“Cornelia tend baby? How could she?” my wife replied, with so much horror in her tone, that remembering the doctor’s injunction that she should be agitated as little as possible, I hastened to add, “If she can’t, she can’t, and there’s an end of it.”

Josephine dropped the subject for thirty-six hours. She chose as a time for taking it up again, the middle of the night, when I had happened to wake up for a moment.

“You would never be willing to live so, Fred,” she began, suddenly.

“Live how, my dear?” I asked, at a loss as to the connection.

“Why, with two servants, of course. Haven’t you been asking me why Cornelia could not tend baby in addition to doing all her other work?”

Now, I was infernally sleepy to begin with, and in the second place I did not like the insinuation contained in Josephine’s opening sentence; so I murmured a little doggedly, “How do other people live?”

"I should just like to see you living like other people," she answered, with a vicious dab at her pillow. "I should just like to see you."

"How does Harry Bolles manage?" I continued. "He has twins, and he keeps only two servants."

I ought to have known better than refer to Harry Bolles at this time of the night, because if there was one thing more than another calculated to arouse the indignation of my wife, it was the trick I had—she called it a trick—of citing the Bolleses as an argument on every possible occasion.

"That just shows how much you know," Josephine replied, slowly, between her teeth. "You would not live as Harry Bolles lives for twenty-four hours."

I was thoroughly awake myself now, and rather mad, so I ventured boldly on the assertion that, so far as I could see, the Bolleses got along very well.

"Now it happens, Fred, that I called on Mrs. Bolles yesterday," said my wife, in a key of scornful triumph, "and it happens that she

confided to me how they do live. One of their servants is a maid of all work, and the nurse divides her time between taking care of the twins and assisting her ; and when she is assisting the other girl or waiting on table, Mrs. Bolles has to take care of the twins, and she looks dragged out, poor thing, in consequence ; and the twins sleep in her room, and they are very wakeful, for they are teething, and she told me that the other night her husband had to walk up and down with one, and she with the other, from twelve until three."

"Where was the nurse?" I inquired, loftily.

"How just like a man to ask 'where was the nurse?' I should be glad to know how you can expect a girl who does half of the work of a house in addition to taking charge all day of two helpless infants, one year and a half old, to lose her night's rest into the bargain. The nurse was in bed asleep, of course. Moreover, Mrs. Bolles told me that Harry looks after the furnace himself. I should like to see you raking out the ashes and shovelling in the coal every morning."

"Pooh !" I answered. "It would be fun

rather than otherwise, if it were necessary."

"Necessary? That's just it. I suppose that I could manage to get along without a nurse, if it were necessary; only I will be honest, Fred, and acknowledge that it would not be fun."

"I wish you would let me go to sleep, Josephine," I remarked at this juncture. "Do you realize what o'clock it is? A man who has to work as hard as I do all day can scarcely be expected to lose his night's rest into the bargain."

Having covered my defeat by means of this adroit shot I lay awake for half an hour longer, absorbed in reverie. As indeed I had been well aware from the beginning, my wife was right about the Bolleses; I would not be willing to live as they did for twenty-four hours. I shuddered and drew the sheet over my head as I pictured myself in overalls, wrestling daily with the intricacies of the furnace and trying to make the world believe that I did it for the sake of the exercise. How pleasant, on a cold winter's night, when you had just finished dressing to go out to dinner

and were taking a little pride in your fleckless shirt-bosom, would be the news that the furnace fire had gone out, involving the alternative that you should rekindle it or imperil the lives of your offspring ! And if I shuddered on my own account, I shuddered tenfold more on account of Josephine, beholding as plainly as could be in my mind's eye, athwart the darkness, my darling pacing the chamber in her wrapper in the small hours of the morning, soothing her baby in order that I might sleep ; for that is what Josephine would be likely to do, being a woman cast in a less selfish mould than the rest of her sex. Indeed, so deeply was I distressed by the pathos of this situation that in the morning, of my own volition, I remarked, in a brisk, off-hand fashion :

“ If you're going to engage a nurse, my dear, be sure you get a good one. If you see the woman you like, don't haggle about wages.”

My wife was silent for an instant, then she smiled to herself in a peculiar way she has and said, “ How queer you are, Fred ! One

moment you put me in the dumps by talking as if we were on the verge of the poor-house, and the next one would suppose from your grandiloquent style that we were rolling in riches."

"Scarcely, my dear," I answered ; "but I fail to see the advantage of making one's self uncomfortable for a paltry twenty-five or fifty dollars a year. That is a woman's idea of economy."

"I have noticed, though, all the same, that on the occasions when I have to ask you for money, you do not act as though you thought even half that sum paltry. I shall remind you of it the next time you dole me out a pitiful five-dollar bill," said the angel of my life, tempering the irony of her words by a sportive smile and an evident disposition to embrace me—from which she was deterred only by the fact that my cheeks were covered with lather.

How often have we enacted a more or less similar bit of private theatricals in the course of our gradual transition from the domestic simplicity represented by two incumbents in

the kitchen, to the numbers and circumstance of the household of a modern family man ! As the consequence of my reluctance, not merely to renounce clothes like to him of Timbuctoo, but to care for the furnace after the pattern of Harry Bolles, I find myself to-day the presiding genius of a retinue which includes, besides the four children who call me father, a cook and a nurse and a parlor-maid and a laundress and a chore-man, whose united efforts to do the work of the household are not entirely able to conceal from me the possibility that I may be cozened at no distant day into adding to their number a kitchen-girl, a coachman, and another nurse. And yet there are individuals who look askance at me as unimaginative, because under pressure of the consciousness that so much flesh and blood is dependent upon me for daily bread, I walk fearlessly under a ladder, am willing to move to the sea-side on Friday, and sit down at table without ado in a company of thirteen.

In the crush of modern civilization he who wishes to arrive must frequently walk under a

ladder, will he, nill he ; and analogously, it does not take a married man long to discover the limitations imposed upon his fancy by his responsibilities as husband, father, and master. Although I have never encountered a ghost, there was a time when I enjoyed listening to the blood-curdling experiences of those who thought they had, and I was altogether willing to ponder the arguments of those who maintained that Bacon wrote Shakespeare. But to-day I find myself in such a frame of mind regarding the unseen world, that I should like nothing better than to see a ghost, in order to be able to shie my boot-jack at it to prove my incredulity ; and I am sorely tempted, when interrogated as to the authorship of Hamlet, to inquire what difference it makes any way. Would not Hamlet still be Hamlet, and Othello, Othello, whether they were written by Shakespeare or by Bacon ?

The reason for this frame of mind is evident enough. Before a married man, in the fullness of his responsibilities as a paterfamilias, leaves the house in the morning, he is likely to hear that there is more coal needed, that

there is a leak in the roof, or that one of the children has swallowed a cent. His wife rushes after him and hails him at the foot of the door-steps to tell him that there is not a bar of soap in the house, and to be sure and bring home some money for the sewing-woman. Provided he has a telephone both at home and down-town, she does not need to send the chore-man to his office with the intelligence that not a drop of water will run in the house, for she is able to ring him up and to let him know at the same time that she fears she may have given away by mistake the wrong suit of his clothes to the chambermaid's brother just out from Sweden. When he arrives home at night he expects to hear that the laundress is utterly dissatisfied with the accommodations in the laundry, that his golden-haired daughter has dropped a doll down the drain-pipe, or that moths have honeycombed his riding trousers. After dinner, if there is no smell of gas which obliges him to ascend a step-ladder and press his nose against the chandelier in search of a leak, he is haply called upon to consider, for the benefit

of the rising generation, whether Jonah's sojourn in the belly of the whale can be reconciled with the laws of natural science, or if it is advisable to allow his eldest son, aged seven, to hang on behind "Booby huts." Then like as not, after he has gone to bed and is just dropping off to sleep, his better half will nudge him to inquire if he *has* brought home that money for the sewing-woman. Then there are the bills from the butcher and the grocer and the milkman to absorb his attention on the first of every month, and from the plumber and the dress-maker and the gas company at the beginning of every quarter, and from the tax-collector, the ice-man, and the dancing-school teacher at periods when they are the least welcome. Though he "remembers" substantially on Christmas day everyone who has the slightest claim on his bounty, from his wife's mother to the letter carrier and the elevator boy down-town, he is certain to be lured from the dinner-table half a dozen times during the month of January by the mysterious whisper of the house-maid that there is "a gentleman" waiting to see him in

the hall, who invites him to subscribe to the coachman's ball, the waiter's ball, the policeman's ball, or the fireman's ball, as the case may be. In the early summer he is moved to the country or the seaside, and in the early autumn he is moved back again, and during the interim his office is a sort of receiving bureau for bundles, which he is expected to carry out to his family, containing everything from a single skein of sewing-silk to a carboy of analyzed spring water. Considering the multiplicity of these distractions, is it altogether surprising if he remains comparatively indifferent as to whether William Tell really shot an apple off his son's head or was only a mythical humbug?

I live in the city in an unpretentious little house which must be moderately elastic, seeing that Josephine confided to me, after the birth of our first baby, that if we ever had another we should have to move; for we have two boys and two girls, and I still have faith, in spite of my wife's direct asseveration to the contrary, that we should be able to tuck away a number five somewhere. We

look out at our neighbors over an infinitesimal grass-plot which is brought to my attention conspicuously twice a year, once when an itinerant gardener calls, about the time the snow flies, with a bill for having kept it in order for a twelvemonth, and again in mid-summer, when happening to visit the house to make sure that the water-pipes have not burst or thieves taken up a permanent residence during the absence of the family, I am confronted by an army of weeds almost as high as the door-sill. What a ghoulis experience it is, by the way, to go prowling about a closed-up house from sheer motives of domestic prudence and the expectation of disagreeable discoveries. There is a deathly stillness as you enter, consistent with the dim and stuffy atmosphere, which perplexes the nostrils by suggesting alternately sewer gas, decomposing mouse, and insect powder. As you walk across the uncarpeted hall, sundry pieces of furniture detonate like pistol-shots to the infinite peril of your nerves, and it is only when you have examined the safe and found it unrifled that you are ready to believe that

the establishment has no inmates. Your wife has told you that in order to obtain your gray trousers, which were left behind by mistake, you have only to look in the top drawer of her bureau for the key of the cedar chest and undo a bundle immediately under your eyes in the right-hand corner next the wall, marked plainly, "Fred's winter clothes." You fail to find any key in the top drawer, but you light upon three bunches of keys in the third, most of which are unlabelled. After trying the majority of those without labels you discover the key of the cedar chest, which proves to be unlocked after all. As you raise the lid a profound smell of camphor pervades the air. You gaze blankly at a wide expanse of neatly tucked-in sheet, which you hesitate to disturb from the fear lest you will never be able to tuck it in again. Removing it gingerly, you behold a well-packed arrangement of bundles. You examine the bundle immediately under your eyes in the right-hand corner and find there is no mark on it ; but the bundle beside it is clearly marked "my robin's egg blue tea-gown." You say to yourself that perhaps

Josephine meant the left-hand corner next the wall, and you investigate, only to find a bundle marked "baby's winter coat." You look in the right-hand corner away from the wall and in the left-hand corner away from the wall, but fail to find what you are in search of. Occupying the middle space is a huge, carefully swathed bundle inscribed "the drawing-room curtains."

"Dash it all ! Where are my trousers ?" you say to yourself, beginning to perspire freely from the intensity of your emotions. Regardless of your wife's strict injunction to disturb nothing, you seize upon "the drawing-room curtains" and deposit them on the floor beside you, exposing thereby an array of other bundles over which your glance passes feverishly, but in vain. "Dash it all !" you mutter again, and out come "my robin's egg blue tea-gown" and "baby's winter coat," and the bundles which bore no marks. "Dash it all, where are those trousers ?" you repeat with rising exasperation, and out come "the children's winter leggings," "Fred's great-coat," "my velvet skirt," and "dining-

room rug" higgledy-piggledy. You are fuming now, and you pitch out everything right and left until there is nothing remaining in the cedar chest but "my seal-skin sack" and "Fred's arctics." Then you gaze around you gloomily, still dispossessed of the gray trousers, and not altogether satisfied with your handiwork. You begin to pitch the things in again, and to squash them savagely into position. You feel furious with Josephine for having deceived you. As you return each bundle, you note superciliously whatever writing there is on it. All of a sudden you flush, and a sensation of shame and disgust besets the small of your back, and you find yourself confronted by the words, "Fred's winter clothes." You realize, too, that the bundle bearing this inscription is identical in size and shape with the one which, when you raised the lid of the chest, was immediately under your eyes in the right-hand corner next the wall. You scan it for a moment ruminantly, examine the other side and proceed to scrutinize two or three other bundles. You have guessed the truth, which is that the unmarked

side had happened to be uppermost and you had neglected to turn the bundle over. You undo it soberly, and there, sure enough, are the gray trousers.

After doing your best to repack the cedar chest, and finding that you cannot close the lid because of your inability to make room for "the drawing-room curtains," you decide to leave them on top of the chest, and you proceed downstairs to inspect the kitchen and laundry, which you have not yet visited. You go prowling through these lower regions, peering morbidly into coal-bins and wash-tubs, and scanning philosophically the cockroaches disporting themselves over the kitchen range regardless of your presence. A faint moaning sound breaks in upon the prevailing stillness, and you stand still to listen with thumping heart. It is repeated, and it seems to you to emanate from the cellar between the kitchen in the rear and the laundry in front, where the furnace and the store-closet and your private wine-closet are situated. You step thither, and noticing that the store-closet door is on the jar, throw it open,

merely to encounter silence and coffee-scented space. As you stand still listening, the moaning sound is audible again close at hand and more clearly defined, suggesting to your imagination the throes of a dying victim. You say to yourself that a murder must have been committed in your wine-closet, and after a shaky pause you resolutely try the door. It is locked, as it should be. Puzzled, but none the less appalled, you tremulously draw your keys from your pocket, and selecting the right one, fit it to the lock. You draw a deep breath, turn it, and with a doughty effort fling open the door. For a moment there is a ghastly stillness, and then forth from among the demijohns and wine-cases staggers the cat—the missing cat who, as you now recall, was nowhere to be found on the day your family moved out of town, just seven weeks ago.

“Miau—ow !”

“Poor, poor pussy !”

You observe with surprise that though painfully shrunken and emaciated, she still is disposed to twist herself around your legs just as

in the days of her well-fed prosperity, and recalling the adage as to the nine lives of a cat, you wonder how many of them she has left. She looks up at you beseechingly, uttering now and again a piteous mew, while you stand reflecting as to what you are to do with her. By dint of rummaging in the store-closet you find an empty basket, into which you make sundry attempts to deposit her, but with so little success that you end by calling in at a neighboring grocer's and making an arrangement with him for a pecuniary consideration to capture her and feed her until you return to town. You leave him your keys for the purpose, with directions to return them to your office, and you proceed soberly on your way down-town.





III

I WAS describing my house. If it be true that a man's house is his castle, it is equally so that the chief seat of his domestic happiness is his parlor. I use the term advisedly, meaning by parlor the room in which his evenings are habitually spent and where he feels most thoroughly and comfortably at home, be it known technically as drawing-room, library, or den. There are people who prefer to maintain a best room for the entertainment of company, where the most magnificently ugly of their belongings are commonly to be found, and in which the window-shades are kept perpetually lowered in order to preserve the carpets, and a fire is never lighted from the dread of

smoke-dust. But I agree with Josephine that what we deem comfortable is none too comfortable for our friends ; and as a consequence we have participated freely from the very first in our own splendor.

Is there anything more attractive to the newly married Benedict than the cosiness of his evenings at home, in the midst of his household gods and by the side of his sweet partner for life ? Even though she objects to his putting his boots on the sofa or badgers him into wearing a swallow-tail coat at dinner every night, is he not a thousand-fold happier than when flitting from ball-room to theatre and from theatre to club in search of feverish excitement ? As a well-to-do bachelor, he may perhaps have endeavored to banish dirt by the witchery of assiduous tipping, and to produce the semblance of connubial comfort by a prodigal display of choice upholstery, rare Japonica, and a masterpiece or two in the line of contemporary art ; but, except in moments of occasional self-delusion, he has ever been conscious that his hearth was alike cheerless and dusty. Now, under his changed con-

ditions he has, if inclined for conversation, an ever delightful companion ; if, moody and exhausted, he prefers silence or a book, even the traditional mouse cannot be stiller than his angel; and is she not perpetually ready to play *béziq*ue or back-gammon, or to read aloud, or to listen to him read in case he derives satisfaction from his own performance? He sits in his easy-chair under the latest improvement in lamps and the latest device in ornamental shades, surrounded by tokens from his friends, vases and clocks, thermometers and paper-cutters, a trio of etchings, and a bust of the young Augustus. It seems to him as though he would like to pass his evenings forever in this paradise with perhaps an occasional jaunt to the theatre every fortnight or so by way of variety.

Josephine and I had both, as young people go, seen a great deal of society before we became husband and wife. Although I was never bowled over by anyone so completely as by Josephine, there were, as I have often admitted to her, several young women—say half a dozen by way of a round number—with

whom I was more or less infatuated during the course of my bachelorhood. Consequently I was an assiduous attendant at every form of evening festivity. The same had been true substantially of Josephine, who, by dint of her great social popularity, maintained sisterly relations successively with a number of young men ambitious to become still nearer and dearer to her.

We alike, therefore, rejoiced in our opportunity to stay quietly at home, and the long winter evenings of the first year of our married life never dragged. We read and we chatted, we dozed and we played games, we compared impressions regarding the cook and cavilled at the price of beef, and we were altogether happy. Of course, we dined out every now and then with Josephine's parents or with mine, and took what they were pleased to call pot-luck with intimate friends like the Bolleses ; but to all intents and purposes we eschewed society. Josephine had her own reasons for not wishing to appear in public, and I was only too willing to abet her in this respect. I invested in an encyclo-

pædia, subscribed to the leading magazines, and pored over "Pigs in Clover" and kindred puzzles, with a view to making our domestic cosiness complete.

Baby was born in July, and by the time we returned from the sea-side in the early autumn, Josephine was looking not merely like her own self, but handsomer than I had ever seen her. Moreover, she was in famous spirits, and she declared that she was ready for anything and everything—words which sounded just a little ominous to my conjugal ear.

"Fred," she said, with rather an apologetic air, one evening shortly after, "I shall have to order some new clothes."

"Whatever you see fit, my dear," I answered glibly, for I wished my wife to have everything in the way of dress which she deemed essential to her appearance and happiness.

Being in the habit of leaving the details of selection and purchase entirely to her discretion, I thought no more of the matter until one afternoon, some three weeks later, when

on my return from down-town I was conducted upstairs into the spare room by Josephine, with a radiantly mysterious air, and confronted with a trio of elaborately flounced and furbelowed ball-dresses spread out upon the bed.

"Don't you think they're pretty, Fred?" she inquired, solicitously.

"What are they for?" I asked, with pursed lips and a wrinkling brow.

"For? Why, they're evening dresses, of course. The black lace and the lilac silk are for receptions or dinners, and the white tulle is for dancing parties."

"I thought we were not going to any more parties," I said, dryly. Josephine became suddenly grave, then answered plaintively: "You know I haven't been anywhere for a year, Fred."

"Neither have I, my dear. What is more, I have no desire to," I retorted, with an air of such superior virtue that my wife was visibly disconcerted.

"You mustn't suppose for a moment, Fred," she faltered, presently, "that I don't

prefer my quiet evenings at home with you to anything else in the world, for I do ; but—but don't you think that if we were never to go anywhere people would forget us, and we should be apt to grow dull and rusty ? Were it not that I feel as if we owed it to ourselves to go about occasionally, I shouldn't mention the fact that, while you are at your office, I sometimes never speak to anybody for days at a time excepting baby and the servants. Besides I don't see very well how we can avoid going to Mrs. Badger's reception. She would be sure to think it very queer and pointed if we stayed away."

It was now my turn to look grave. To begin with, Mrs. Badger was one of my oldest friends. I had been a frequent guest at her house during my bachelorhood, and was indebted to her for many kindnesses. It was she who gave us our six Apostle spoons when we were married. It would never do for us to fail to appear at her reception. Moreover, not being so bad a fellow at heart as some people would make out, I was experiencing qualms on the score of Josephine's allusion to

her own solitary state while I was down town, and I could not help acknowledging to myself that it was only natural she should pine for a little diversion after being cooped up all day. Accordingly I answered, in a tone of subdued resignation :

“ If Mrs. Badger is to give a reception, I suppose we shall have to go. We ought not, of course, to make complete hermits of ourselves. What is the date of it ? ”

“ A fortnight from to-day. The invitation only came this afternoon. And there is an invitation, Fred, from the Dobbsses for a dinner on the 15th, and one from Mrs. Cyrus Merryman for a small musical party on the 17th,” added my darling, timidly. “ What do you wish me to do about them ? ”

I gulped down my feelings so as to reply with an affectation of cheerfulness.

“ We had better accept. I dare say it will do you good to see a little of the world, for it is rather hard that you should be left alone with me the whole time.”

“ Oh, Fred, that wasn't what I said at all. It just slipped out anyway; but if I only were

alone with you all the time I should never wish to be with anyone else."

"Flatterer," I murmured. "On the contrary, I am ready to acknowledge that a little variety will benefit us both, and if you trot me out occasionally I shall do my best not to grumble."

"And you do think the dresses are pretty, don't you, Fred?" she asked imploringly, after escaping from the embrace with which my magnanimity is rewarded. "I had been looking forward so to your liking them."

I praised her finery as in duty bound, and thereafter for the next fortnight Josephine's eyes scintillated expectation, and she went about the house humming snatches of old waltzes. But on the evening itself, while she was dressing for the party, she turned suddenly to me and said, with a little nervous shiver: "Fred, I don't believe a single soul in the room will speak to me. I feel positively like a green young thing going to her first cotillon. Remember that you are on no account to leave me all alone by myself."

"Bosh!" I muttered, sleepily. To tell the

truth, I had indulged in a cat-nap after dinner, and had just been waked up with the injunction that it was time to dress. "I wish in the name of goodness that I was in bed."

How differently I would have reasoned a twelvemonth before! Then it seemed the most natural thing in the world to struggle into a dress suit at ten o'clock at night, when a large portion of humanity was getting ready for slumber. Now, while I fitted the studs into my shirt-bosom I silently reflected on the folly of turning night into day, and inveighed against the custom of going to parties two hours later than the hour specified in the invitation. We had been asked at eight, but, as Josephine sagely remarked, it would have been crazy to order our carriage before ten unless we wished to be the first to arrive.

We were tolerably early as it was. Josephine looked superbly in her white tulle with some roses, which I had given her, in her corsage, and I felt decidedly proud as I made my way up to our hostess with her on my arm. After exchanging greetings with Mrs. Badger, we fluttered a few yards to one side and

found ourselves presently looking into each other's eyes with much the same helpless expression with which the babes in the wood must have regarded each other after their cruel uncle had abandoned them. I had taken it for granted that Josephine's old friends would stumble over each other in their haste to renew their friendship with her, and, though she asseverated afterward that she had no such expectation, I do not believe that she was prepared to remain for five minutes exclusively in my society. Several men whom she knew bowed low to her from a distance, but that was the limit of their devotion for the time being. A queer sort of look appeared in Josephine's eyes, and she fanned herself with a vehemence which seemed to me inconsistent with the temperature of the atmosphere. As for me, I felt like seizing the first available man I knew by the shoulders and asking him how he dared to leave a lovely creature like my wife standing without a soul to speak to except her husband.

Relief came from an unexpected quarter, in the person of young P. Augustus Tomlins,

toward whom I shall ever cherish kindly feelings, despite the fact that he is a worm, socially speaking. At least, Josephine would scarcely have deigned to look at him in her palmy days, and, though she was considerate as belles go, would have been apt to crush him had he persisted in forcing himself on her attention. But you would have supposed that he was one of her oldest friends, from the effusive manner with which she greeted him on this occasion. Indeed, P. Augustus himself seemed to be taken aback at the cordiality bestowed upon him ; he literally gasped with pleasure, and as he ambled off a moment after with my darling on his arm, his features were singularly suggestive of an elated Cheshire cat.

A married man left to his own devices in a crowded ball-room feels a certain lack of responsibility. Society has become for him largely panoramic, and he is disposed toward contemplative torpor rather than action. Mrs. Badger's reception was a coming-out party for her niece, to which, colloquially speaking, all the world and his mother had been in-

vited, and I found myself viewing, as in a glass, the several generations struggling for elbow-room, with a sense of being a spectator rather than a participant. From the eddy, into which I was swept by the muslin skirt of a young thing fresh from the nursery, I scanned the assembled company irresolutely and without incentive. I saw a host of familiar faces and many new ones. The same Jacks were whisking the same or different Jills round and round the smoothly polished floor. The staircase was lined with couples who had sought shelter from the torrid crush of the main drawing-room, where it was barely possible to move, much less to sit down. The tum-tum of the instruments contended fiercely with the hum of many voices, to the evident discomfiture of that old beau Gillespie Gore, who, within ear-shot of where I stood, was describing the recent excavations on the site of ancient Troy to a matron whose eyes furtively followed her daughter's maiden progress. The ball was at its height, and—familiar sight—the couples on the stairs were making a pathway

for Mrs. Willoughby Walton, who was arriving abominably late, in black tulle and ostrich feathers, with a wealth of roses banked against her expansive bosom. All seemed so natural, and yet so completely different.

Just as I was saying to myself that it would never do for me to stand ruminating, and that I must speak to somebody, chance landed within a few yards of me my old friend, Miss Polly Flinders, almost breathless with waltzing. Pretty Polly Flinders ! There was a time——. But let that pass. These are the reflections of a married man. The last time we had met, oddly enough, was in this very house, nearly two years before, when we had passed the evening together under an india-rubber tree, discussing the interesting problem whether girls are apt to accept men the first time they ask them.

I sidled up to her and inquired how she did, and the cordial manner in which she said, “Why, how do you do? it’s ages since we’ve met !” warmed the cockles of my heart. Then with a beaming, but slightly quizzical, smile she inquired after the health

of my first-born. Now, I had for a moment forgotten that I was a husband and father, and was willing for a single night to ignore the fact. Therefore I sought, by a non-chalant reply, to banish the subject of little Fred. But Polly supposing evidently that the only hold she could hope to have upon my interest was through him, would not be balked. She not only made inquiries as to the color and amount of his hair, and the shade of his eyes, and the development of his teeth, and as to whether he favored Josephine or me in his infantile physiognomy, but she unearthed for my edification all the anecdotes concerning precocious babies which had appeared in the pages of *Punch*, *Puck* or *Life* for the past decade. She employed successively in his behalf the most flattering epithets — “cunning,” “sweet,” “cute,” “angelic”—but always, be it said, under cloak of an ambiguous “it,” which made clear to my paternal instinct that she was uncertain as to his gender, and did not really know him from Adam.

I sought refuge in a waltz, after which I

asked Polly, with some of the archness characteristic of my demeanor as a bachelor, if she would not like to quit the dancing-room, where we were standing close to the wall in juxtaposition with everybody, for a more retired spot. I had the ottoman underneath the india-rubber tree in my mind. Polly shook her head, saying that she thought it was very nice where we were, and began to ask me about the Symphony concerts. From these we branched off to the current theatrical attractions and the unusual prevalence of pneumonia. Though she was kindly and amiable as could be, and was far too well-bred a girl to let her eyes wander deliberately round the room, it came over me gradually that she was on the alert for someone else. I asked her to waltz again, but she sweetly pleaded fatigue and thrust herself further forward, so that she could be distinctly visible from every quarter. Happily not many minutes elapsed before Andromeda was rescued from her monster by a magnificent Perseus in a white waistcoat, with whom I had the melancholy satisfaction of espying her later in the evening under the

india-rubber tree, deep doubtless in some problem similar to that which she and I had left unsolved two years before. Could I blame her? Surely not. Polly was an old stager, and on her last legs, matrimonially speaking. I felt that it was rather for me to ask her pardon for having subjected her to the importunities of a social Methuselah like myself.





IV

IT must have been about three months later, toward the fag end of the season, when Josephine said to me impressively one evening after our return from some festivity :

“ If a woman is really in love with her husband she cannot expect to have a very good time at a party. She may enjoy herself after a fashion, but in order to thrill as she did as a girl it is necessary to be interested more or less in somebody else. Which proves,” she continued, turning her face fondly in my direction, “ that you are a dear, darling duck.”

I was detaching a rose-bud from the lapel of my dress-coat at the moment, and was therefore too busy to acknowledge this com-

pliment appropriately ; but I took upon myself to inquire what she proposed to do about it.

“I don’t see that I can do anything, that’s the difficulty,” she answered dolefully. “So long as you continue to be tolerably nice, I suppose that I must be content to be more or less bored when I go anywhere ; not always aggressively bored, perhaps, but comparatively so, considering the nice times which some married women seem to have. If only I were able to flirt,” she added with a despondent little sigh, “I should get on famously.”

I begged her not to abstain from anything of the kind on my account.

“Don’t flatter yourself, my dear,” she said. “The melancholy fact is I have tried already and failed—failed signally.”

“Tried what ?”

“Tried to flirt, Fred. I have tried desperately ; but it is no use. I will confess that for purely social purposes I have done my best to imagine that I hate you, and have stuffed my ears, metaphorically speaking, with cotton wool so as to obliterate you from my inner

consciousness ; but it has been a ghastly failure ; you would keep popping up in my mind just as I was beginning to become a little interested. Hence my conclusion, at which I have arrived gradually and with great reluctance. Kiss me, dear."

It had not escaped my observation that up to this time Josephine had been exceedingly non-committal regarding the mild succession of receptions, dinners, and other evening entertainments which we had been attending. In fact she had been inclined to put me off with an evasive answer whenever I inquired whether she had enjoyed herself. Consequently I had divined that she was by no means carried away by her intercourse with the gay world. But I had not been prepared for these gloomily philosophical deductions, which were peculiarly interesting to me from the fact that they were more or less germane to my own.

"In case my death would be any accommodation——" I began.

But my wife interrupted my would-be flippancy to say : "I am not complaining, mind you, Fred. There are plenty of women of my

age who don't have half so pleasant a time in society as I do, but—but—" she added, with an amused laugh, "it has taken me until now to get accustomed to the idea that it is impossible for me to enjoy myself as I did as a girl. The flirting was the last resort, and now that has failed. Fred, you must be very good to me for the rest of my life.

"You see," she continued, presently, with a soliloquizing air, "when I went to a party before I was married there was always someone on whom I could count to speak to me before the end of the evening, and for whom I was secretly on the lookout, as it were. There were apt to be certain men who, without being in love with me necessarily, were so far disposed to drift in my direction that I was kept perpetually buoyed up while talking with stupid people by the hope of seeing them, and absorbed after they did speak to me by the delightful uncertainty as to the future. But now there is no uncertainty at all ; everything has happened that can happen ; a view of the case which never occurred to me until lately when I was trying to realize why I didn't find

society more interesting. I did have rather a good time at Mrs. Badger's reception, and the first two or three subsequent parties, from the sheer novelty of seeing people again after so many months. Every one was very cordial, and what with the lights and the dresses and the joy of being able to waltz again I didn't miss the fact that no one was particularly devoted to me. But as time went on and the novelty wore off, I began to be painfully aware that though my men friends of by-gone days would be ready to jump overboard to rescue me in case I was in peril of drowning, or to get up a subscription for me if in pecuniary distress, I couldn't count on them to take the least genuine interest in me or to talk other than the dreariest platitudes. They were superficially polite enough, and now and then one of them would take me out in the german and give me a woolly lamb or a tinsel star"—indicating a small collection of toys of this description on her dressing-table, husbanded for the benefit of baby—"but almost invariably I was made to feel when one of them strolled up to me with his hands in his

pockets and emitted a few commonplace sentences, that he did it out of charity, and that he meant at the same time politely to give me to understand that having made my choice I must abide by it and not expect any very great exertion on his part. I was provoked by this at first, but after reflection I realized that I had no real right to complain ; yet finding it excessively dull to pass evening after evening in this wise, I was spurred to discover a remedy, and the remedy dawned upon me one day all of a sudden when my gaze happened to light on Mrs. Gregory Scott and Philip Blair looking into each other's eyes in an alcove. 'There,' said I to myself, 'is a married woman who really enjoys herself.' And I reasoned in the same breath, 'It is because she is able to forget that she is married.' And then, Fred, if you will believe it of me, I caught myself asking whether I also couldn't manage to lay the flattering unction to my soul that I was nobody's wife, and forget you, if only for an evening or two. Not that I wished to consign you to oblivion for all time, as I am afraid that Mrs. Scott has prac-

tically done in the case of Gregory ; but I was painfully conscious of an immediate intention to try to become a little more like my old self, cost what it might."

"While it is doubtless a less simple matter to obtain a divorce in this commonwealth as compared with many of the Western States, still I think, my dear, that any judge——"

"Wait until I have finished, Fred, and when you hear how utterly I was disappointed, you will agree that I have been punished sufficiently. After making up my mind to carry out my fell design, I cast about me for a victim on whom to exercise my powers of fascination and an opportunity for exercising them. Among the men I used to know before we were married, Reginald Robbins has been the least indifferent since. I never knew him very well, but I have always rather liked him, and he has been growing steadily handsome, so when he happened to speak to me at Mrs. Sloane's musicale a few evenings later, I said to myself, 'Why won't he do?' He has naturally a gallant manner, and somehow it seemed to me that evening when he bent

down to speak to me that he had quite the air of devotion. At any rate, I tried to appear correspondingly gracious and glad to see him, and I astonished myself by the spritely, not to say flippant, style of my conversation. I felt my heart going pit-a-pat from excitement at my efforts, and I kept saying to myself, 'Now you mustn't think of Fred, or baby, or anybody, but just go ahead and enjoy yourself.' As for Mr. Robbins, he looked astonished himself at first, then puzzled, and then a strange gleam of animation came over his features, and he gazed at me in a way which showed me that he thought he understood. Someone began to sing an ardent, tremendous piece from the Italian, and through it I was conscious of his eyes riveted upon me, and when the song was finished he bent down and whispered in my ear in the confidential fashion which the men who are devoted to other people's wives ordinarily assume. What he said was commonplace enough, but the way in which he said it sent the blood flying to my cheeks. I felt that everyone in the room must be looking at me, and I was con-

scious of thinking how disagreeable it was, and was glad to have him just then offer me his arm to take me into supper. At supper he was my devoted slave, and I employed the intervals while he was gone to get me things in soothing my ruffled spirit and trying to persuade myself that I found him entrancing. Fortified by a glass of champagne, I submitted to take his arm again and be led away from the world at large into the conservatory, where we established ourselves mysteriously in a corner as I have often seen Mrs. Scott and the women like her do. On the way he let fall two or three complimentary speeches, each one of which affected me like so many bits of ice dropped down my back, though I had expected to find them charming, so that when we faced each other after sitting down I felt like a ramrod. Still determined to persevere I resolutely wreathed my face in a complacent smile, and put my hands, metaphorically speaking, over my ears to shut out the still, small voices which seemed to be whispering, 'What a fool you are, what a fool you are !' Then he began to talk, giving me to under-

stand, in a low confidential tone, that his life was not what it might be for the lack of a controlling influence, and ever and anon he would bend his dark eyes upon me in an ardent way, ostensibly in search of the sympathy which I was expected to bestow, and indicating as plainly as could be, short of actual speech, that I might become that controlling influence if I would. Here was exactly the situation I had longed for ; and yet, struggle as I would to pump up a corresponding degree of enthusiasm, I found myself sitting tongue-tied and coldly indifferent. My emotions of disgust had given place to mockery, and instead of being absorbed and thrilled by the confidences of my victim, as I had expected, I was conscious of thinking how ridiculous he was, and I could not help comparing him with you and reflecting how infinitely nicer you were in every way, and what a goose I was to be sitting there. All this, my dear, when I ought to have been yearningly interested and encouraging. You may imagine what a come down it was for me. I had wished with all my soul to be sympathetic

and to thrill with the pride of conquest, and the outcome was that while he murmured to me about his past life I could scarcely keep my eyes off his nose, which he has a way of twinkling like a bunny rabbit, a peculiarity I had never noticed before. It was simply terrible to be sitting there scrutinizing him in cold blood after leading him on ; and yet the intenser he became, the more hilarious I grew inwardly, and I don't know what would have been the upshot—I am afraid I might have laughed in his face—had I not happened to spy you in the distance, and sprung to my feet saying that you were looking for me. An expression of surprise and disappointment came over my victim's features at my abrupt termination of our *tête-à-tête*, but he whispered with eager earnestness, ' On what afternoons shall I be likely to find you at home ? ' seeking at the same moment to retain my hand with an endearing pressure, a symptom of his regard so little to my fancy that, looking him steadily in the eyes, I answered with a cold precision which he could not mistake : ' I am never at home in the afternoon, Mr.

Robbins.' Poor fellow ! His devotion to me since has been limited to very distant bows ; but I—I am a blighted being, Fred ; and, as I said to you just now, you will have to be very good to me for the rest of my life. And I am getting gray, to cap the climax," Josephine added, holding up to the light for close scrutiny a single long hair detached by the sweep of her comb.

As I have already hinted, these observations on the part of my wife were of peculiar interest to me at this time, for I was in process of mulling over in my mind my own experiences of society as a married man. Having admitted that she was much to be pitied for the forlornness of her state, I ventured to remark, with a tentative air :

"Does it not seem to you, my dear, little short of inhuman that married people should be incapable of deriving pleasure from the society of their fellow beings of the opposite sex merely because they happen to be devoted to each other ? "

"It is true of you, then, also ?" queried Josephine, with a little gush of happiness.

"I was not sure how it would be in the case of a man."

"I was stating the problem hypothetically," I replied, with gravity. Josephine regarded me narrowly, and said she had noticed that I had been singularly non-committal.

"Surely I have complained often enough of being bored," I answered.

"At first, perhaps; but recently I have been struck by the fact that you were perking up. Who, pray, gave you that rosebud?" she added, indicating the single trophy which I had carried away from the german that evening.

"Mrs. Guy Sloane."

I spoke with an affectation of indifference which was inconsistent with the confusion of my cheeks.

"Precisely! I have no doubt," continued Josephine, with sardonic deliberateness, "that she would be very proud to add you to her collection."

To the married man the members of the society in which he moves possesses an identity more distinct than for the young buck who

still fancies that he may any day set out on an exploring expedition to the North Pole, or decide to settle in Seattle. The Benedict arranges them and docketts them in his mind's eye with much the same unconscious cerebration with which the accustomed whist-player sorts his hand. To a discriminating taste Mrs. Guy Sloane is unquestionably the most attractive and interesting of all the young married women who are socially significant in the society to which Josephine and I belong. She is not a flibbertigibbet and purely volatile like Mrs. Gregory Scott, nor aggressively worldly like Mrs. Willoughby Walton; but she lacks neither the piquancy and dash of the one nor the enterprise, graciousness, and magnificent proclivities of the other. Mrs. Scott is a rampant waltzer, and when there is no dancing to be had is perpetually in corners. Mrs. Walton is nothing if not ultra fashionable. Her costumes are marvels of the dressmaker's art, if somewhat scantier than occasion requires. She entertains superbly, participates ardently in everything in vogue, from a grand reception to a mysteriously conducted Chinese

theatre-party, and manages at the same time to inspire more or less curiosity in the social mind as to the nature of the intimacies which she wages with successive members of the male sex. But no breath of scandal has ever dallied with the name of Mrs. Guy Sloane. She is no less genial in her tendencies than Mrs. Walton ; her establishment is even more complete in that it is artistic and original. One who dines with Mrs. Willoughby may count on caviare and terrapin, but it is only at Mrs. Guy's that you are liable to hear the centrepiece of flowers suddenly discourse sweet music, or find yourself masticating a genuine Japanese repast—snails, seaweed, raw fish, and saki water—served by maidens from the far East on their bended knees, after the most approved Oriental fashion. But it is not merely that Mrs. Guy is delightfully unconventional ; a more salient charm is the refined and refining cast of her intelligence. She is a patron of the arts, a student of books, and a promoter of culture ; she is prodigiously prominent in philanthropy and tenement-house reform ; celebrities from abroad bring letters

to her, and her domestic circle of admirers includes the brightest minds of the community.

Unlike Josephine, I had returned to society free from roseate anticipations and almost under protest. I had not expected to be amused, and even my untoward experience with pretty Polly Flinders left me pensive rather than sore. I drifted aimlessly from house to house, nursing the scarcely concealed consciousness that I would infinitely rather be at my own fireside with the wife of my bosom than gallivanting in the gay world. In talking to the unmarried girls I labored under the dread that I was obstructing pre-matrimonial billing and cooing, and I found the average married woman of Josephine's age complacently ruminant as a milch cow and disposed to enthusiasm only at the mention of her husband's name. However much you may admire a man it is scarcely exhilarating to be obliged to listen to a recapitulation of his virtues and opinions until you are enabled to stifle the flow of conjugal eloquence with chicken-salad and a roll. After two or three experiences of this kind I suffered myself, by way of preference, to be buttonholed, on

the plea of a glass of champagne, in the supper-room after nearly everybody had left it, by Gillespie Gore, whose views on the tariff, though wearisome, are encyclopædic ; or I would establish myself by the side of some middle-aged mother so absorbed in keeping an eye on her daughter as to be unaware if I was passably somnolent.

But the most devoted husband must feel impelled at last, by dint of purposeless drivel on his own part, if by no other motive, to try to make the best of a distasteful situation. Heaven knows I had no inclination to flirt with anybody, as did my darling, according to her own confession, and not once did it occur to me that I wished myself unfettered by the vows of marriage. I was too radiantly happy to desire to obscure or blot out for a moment the image of Josephine from my social retina. But, on the other hand, I was distinctly weary of wandering from drawing-room to drawing-room without a purpose, and just as Josephine's attention gradually centred itself on certain women with a view to emulating their behavior, my starved state

of mind turned for recreation and companionship in a similar direction.

The three women to whom I have already alluded stood out conspicuously from the rest as the leading social spirits of the hour. I hesitated briefly between them, but only briefly. A few words with Mrs. Gregory Scott sufficed to convince me that though she might grow in favor with me, I should never do for her. We had been acquaintances in former days, before either she or I were married ; but we had never been particularly sympathetic. She had been inclined, I think, to regard me as a little slow, and though she received my present advances graciously enough, her small, snapping eyes seemed to say that whoever aspired to stand high in her regard must be in attendance early and late, be prodigal of flowers and small attentions, be ready to fetch and carry and make himself generally useful. My need was companionship, not servitude ; accordingly I made my bow and turned elsewhere.

On the other hand, Mrs. Willoughby Walton, with all her social prestige, impressed

me as aspiring chiefly to reproduce the type of fashionable woman who figures in the pages of contemporary Parisian fiction ; and just as the bastard imitations of the French novelists written in our mother tongue seem to me wholly to lack the fascination of their Gallic prototypes, the reflection was forced upon me that I should find an affair with Mrs. Willoughby no less insipid than compromising. The world may pardon a man who is enthralled by a woman who knows no scruples, but it justly jeers at one who dangles at the heels of a woman who merely pretends to be bad. The trouble with Mrs. Willoughby Walton is that she only makes believe ; she does her very best to let people suppose that she is stupendously immoral, and yet the world is well aware in its secret soul that when brought to the scratch she has the virtue of a nun. In her case all is smoke and there is no fire. She reminds one, by her general attitude of depravity, of those nervous, fiery-looking steeds which snort and sidle and caracole and champ until they reek with foam, but which can never be induced to run away.

Women of her type are, so to speak, neither fish, flesh, fowl, nor good red herring. Indeed, it would seem not altogether unfitting if the Deity in His infinite wisdom were to consign them in the great hereafter to a limbo, neither heaven nor hell, similar to that which confined the caitiff choir of angels in Dante's *Inferno*, who neither were faithful to God nor rebellious.

"The heavens expelled them not to be less fair,
Nor them the nethermore abyss receives,
For glory none the damned would have from them."

But, as I have already intimated, no charge of indiscretion had ever been brought against Mrs. Guy Sloane. As I watched her furtively I recognized that she was neither shallow nor fast, that she was alike cultured and uncompromising. I may have reflected also that Josephine, though eminently intelligent and well educated, did not profess to be a clever person, and that it would be interesting to discuss the phases of advanced thought with one who manifestly aspired to keep abreast of the times. Since my duty to my wife and the world at large required my occasional presence in so-

ciety, why not seek companionship with so edifying a personage, instead of kicking my heels in semi-somnolence? In my bachelor days, although we had been acquaintances, I had rather avoided Mrs. Sloane from the fatuous diffidence which often restrains a youth from accosting a woman of so much consideration. It was consequently delightfully reassuring that she should receive me without a trace of haughtiness or reserve on the occasion when I made my first advances to her. We talked together only for a few minutes before she was appropriated by someone else, but later in the evening, while I was standing aimlessly among a group of other husbands waiting for their wives who were dancing the german, she chose to beckon me forth to receive the rosebud which it was her privilege to bestow. After conducting her to her seat I lingered for a few minutes in conversation, and when I rose to go she said, with sweet, frank graciousness, which withal savored of confidence :

“ Do come and see me.”

Hence it was that when Josephine unbos-

omed to me the conclusion at which she had arrived, I inquired if it did not seem to her little short of inhuman that married people should be incapable of deriving pleasure from the society of their fellow beings of the opposite sex merely because they happened to be devoted to each other. I had made up my mind to call on Mrs. Sloane, and so far as my own sex was concerned was not altogether prepared at this juncture to agree with my darling.





OME and see me" is the supplicating formula ever on the lips of the married woman with social proclivities. The other woman's husband to whom it is addressed instinctively replies that he will make a point of doing so, but in nine cases out of ten never goes. Verily, if a married man were to try to sip afternoon tea at every hearth where he is confidently invited to make himself at home, he would soon be bankrupt in days and hours.

To the married man who is busy downtown all day, an afternoon call is a serious circumstance. It involves feverish hurry, if not the expense of a cab, in order to get up-town and make himself presentable before it is too late. You bound up-stairs two steps at a

time, change your shirt, boots, and necktie, slip on a black coat, and deaf to domestic outcries, bolt from the house, and at about a quarter past five halt, perspiring and breathless, at the desired threshold.

You find your hostess in an artistic drawing-room, where a freshly-kindled wood-fire sputters invitingly and the waning daylight has given place to a pink or saffron atmosphere provided by a trio of lamps with festive shades. You are likely, if the house-maid be careless, to detect a faint aroma of kerosene, otherwise of violets. A posse of spotted china dragons gapes at you from the fireplace, and an array of small silver ornaments twinkles at you from low plush tables ; you catch a general glint of vellum-bound volumes and photographs of wan-eyed women in queer frames, and sundry sepia etchings on the wall, and a variety of brilliant-hued cushions disguising the discomfort of numerous quaintly-fashioned chairs and sofas, and forth from her shadowy corner the mistress of it all, blithe, sinuous, and gracious, stretches a welcoming hand and waves you to a seat with soft-toned greetings.

You recite the current news of the hour while the mechanical, mysterious man-servant establishes the burnished urn and the Japanese tray resplendent with the daintiest silverware and cups and saucers. In silence you watch your hostess saturate the tea-leaves with sphinx-like preoccupation, as though she were performing a sacrificial rite, and it is only when she has left the chemical process to fulfil itself and has dropped back among her cushions that you feel words to be seemly. And then you talk, you and she also—talk of anything and everything, of the book of verses close to her hand, of the ethical considerations governing divorce, of the latest phase in art, of Christian science, of Heine, of the sweating system, or of the Australian ballot law. The conversation flows with the quiet intensity of a river, the battledoor and shuttlecock of argument proceeds with delightful agility on either part. You marvel at your own fluency almost as much as at the felicity and cleverness of her diction, and you realize that you are being spurred to put your best foot forward. You are conservative, natu-

rally, being a lawyer, and as a man of the world inclined to be sceptical and materialistic ; she, on the other hand, leans toward ideality, or truth, as she delights to call it, and she rebuts the blows of your cold logic with fervid syllogisms. A Christian worshipper, she yet has a warm corner in her heart for Buddha ; an allopath and, in her own words, a humble devotee of science, she smiles like a seraph at mysterious cures ; and her interrogative eyebrows perpetually fend from satire the splayfoot of the impressionist.

How deftly she remembers your prejudices in respect to cream and sugar when the chemical process is complete and she proffers you a cup of tea ! A man's wife may live to be a hundred and yet never be certain whether he takes one lump or two ; women like Mrs. Guy Sloane need to be told but once. And while you dally with your cup and munch a delicate shred of bread and butter, or a biscuit of evanescent and fairy-like thinness, she pursues her argument with a glib and wistful intensity which holds you in its thrall until another visitor arrives or the tones of the clock

warn you that your dinner hour is approaching.

"You will come again soon," she says wistfully, as you bow low over her outstretched hand, and you murmur that you assuredly will, and as you scurry home, so as to be in time for the family mutton, the odor of violets is in your nostrils and you shrink from ugliness and squalor (pronounced squā-lor) with the sensitiveness of one whose æsthetic instincts have been gloriously catered to.

So it is the first time and the second, and so it is substantially the fifth, and then there comes a change ; a gradual one, but nevertheless a change, and on her part, not on yours. You have found each recurring call as enjoyable, if not more so, than the last, and have come to regard these five o'clock meetings as one of your most agreeable diversions from workaday routine. She has lent you books bristling with modern thought, and you have read them, and you have bent the full blast of your intelligence on the tement-house problem and the development of

the stage, and learned to distinguish between an artist and a painter, so that you are a perfect arsenal of eager, combative opinions on these several subjects. Yet you are asking yourself why it is that, though you are far better equipped and consequently a much more interesting companion than at first, she manifests a certain listlessness while you are talking, and instead of appreciating and endeavoring to answer your subtleties shows a disposition to avoid discussion. She wears, too, an air of gentle, cold melancholy, as though she were disappointed in you, which is puzzling and disconcerting. You interrogate your inner consciousness as to how you can possibly have offended her, and you remain nonplussed. It seems to you as she sits toying with her teaspoon, that her eyebrows have become almost scornful. What is the matter? What have you done?

But for Josephine the cause might never have been revealed to me in my own particular experience with Mrs. Guy Sloane. As it was, I remained completely mystified until our intimacy had faded into commonplace ac-

quaintance. There was never any breach between us, never a disagreeable word ; yet little by little the emanation of her chilling, listless disdain reduced me to wondering silence. Conscious that my conversation was listened to with perfunctory politeness, I became tongue-tied and moody in my turn, and so far ill at ease that on one occasion I devoured involuntarily the entire supply of thin shreds of bread and butter, whereupon she summoned the mysterious man-servant, and with a haughty, pitiful smile bade him bring a fresh relay. There was a perpetual sadness in her expression which told me more plainly at each successive meeting that I had been weighed in the balance and been found wanting, a sadness which seemed to imply that she had put her trust in me in vain. At one of our last interviews, when she was more than commonly plaintive, and I was beating my brain to discover the cause of my unworthiness, I asked myself the question, if it could possibly be that she expected me to clasp her in my arms and fold her to my breast after the manner of M. de Camors and

other worthies ; but I dismissed the idea as out of the question. Had it been Mrs. Willoughby Walton—*absit omen* ; but it was sacrilege even to formulate such an idea concerning Mrs. Guy Sloane.

“She would have screamed if you had, and there would have been a terrible scene, and she would never have spoken to you again,” said Josephine, when I laid the matter before her. “Still she would have forgiven you in her secret soul, which she will never do now,” she added, with gentle jubilation.

“What have I done?”

“Done? You have committed, Fred, the unpardonable sin—to a woman—of seeming more interested in the subjects you were discussing than in her, of forgetting her in your enthusiasm for a notion or idea.”

“But she was interested in the subjects herself at first, fully as much as I. It was her enthusiasm which aroused mine.”

“Poor simple innocent ! Are you so guileless as to suppose that a woman like Mrs. Sloane is content to have a man call upon her once or twice a week simply to discuss sub-

jects? I grant you that she is interested in subjects, or rather that she interests herself in them, but they are by themselves merely so many husks in her intention. I can see you, Fred, completely engrossed in the consideration of some grand problem to the utter forgetfulness of everything else, and under the goad of genuine conviction pouring out a torrent of speech with the impetus of a steam fire-engine ; I can see you, dear, I can see you. And you flattered yourself, I dare say, that your logic was unanswerable and that your argument was knocking hers into a cocked hat, and you never dreamed for one moment of the cold shower-bath effect which your magnificent harangue was having upon her sensibilities and hopes."

" Hopes of what ? "

" Don't interrupt me, Fred, and don't misunderstand me. Mrs. Sloane is a woman whose good name is above suspicion. As I said to you a minute ago, if you had kissed her she would have screamed and been mortally offended ; and avowal of passion would have shocked and distressed her irreparably,

for she never harbored such an expectation in her life. But, on the other hand, in admitting you to her intimacy she had definite hopes which you have failed to satisfy ; hopes of sympathy, of mutual confidences as to your and her most secret and personal affairs, of inducing you to substitute her for me as an intellectual companion so far as was compatible with entire respectability ; all of which might have been extremely harassing for poor me had you not been the delightful, obtuse, true-to-your-own-dear-wifey darling that you are. In short, Fred, she asked for bread and you gave her a stone."

"In other words, she expected me to fall in love with her ? "

"Call it 'sympathize with her ;' 'love' is such a strenuous term. She expects the individuals who belong to her collection to be sympathetic, that's all. She and her husband, though they preserve outward appearances, agreed to disagree long ago, as everyone knows ; and accordingly she is lonely, poor soul (what would she say if she knew that insignificant little I had ventured to pity her !),

and in her loneliness she reaches out after other women's husbands for sympathy, somewhat as the cuckoo usurps the nests and sucks the eggs of other birds. She's a sort of social cuckoo, Fred, but of the most refined, fastidious delicate kind. She would be incapable of creating a scandal in the heinous sense of the term, and had she succeeded in getting you into her clutches your duties would not have been severe. You would have been expected to divine that she was unhappy—she would have given you to understand it in a variety of ways without ever condescending to tell you so in express words—and to imply by your manner that did not other ties on her side and yours forbid, matters might be very different. You would have been expected to hint at my little failings without actually mentioning them, so as to give her an opportunity to rhapsodise exaltedly on the sternness of fate and the pathos of disjointed wedlock. You would have been expected to follow her moods—to rejoice when she was glad and to be lugubrious when she was depressed—and to be at her beck and call sufficiently to be

willing to fill places at the last minute at her dinner-parties (by which means she would be able to dispense with my society excepting on the one or two formal occasions in every year when she would invite us both together), and to pass examinations on the marked passages in the books she lent you. And in return, Fred, she would have vouchsafed you on every occasion her most yearning smile and her most gracious hand-pressure, and she would never have wearied of holding forth to you, beside her dainty tea-table by subdued lamplight, upon all theosophies."

"Dearest," said I, as Josephine, having concluded her exposition, regarded me with a suspicion of mockery in her dark eyes, "you should have put me on my guard ; you should not have subjected your Frederick to such untoward liabilities."

"So I did. I warned you at the start—the evening she gave you the rose-bud—that she would be proud to add you to her collection. But what use would it have been to warn you?" Josephine added, eating her words with the sweet complacency peculiar to the

female logician ; “ you would not have believed me. Have you forgotten your haughty refusal to subscribe to my proposition, that married people who love each other cannot expect to have a very good time in society ? ”

“ And I have suffered for it,” I replied, meekly.

“ We have both of us suffered in making the discovery ; but it is a genuine discovery. Hold up your right hand, Fred, and repeat after me, to show that you are thoroughly contrite and convinced, Married people—who really love each other—cannot expect to have—a very good time in society.”

I did as I was bid, and I was tempted to add a heart-felt amen, which evidently suggested to Josephine that I had derived from her formula hopes of emancipation beyond her purpose, for she hastened to add, with distinctness :

“ All the same, we shall have to continue to accept invitations now and then ; we owe it to ourselves and to baby to do so. And I am rather inclined to think that, having once and finally dismissed all roseate anticipations

and made up our minds to expect very little, we shall really enjoy ourselves tolerably well."

"Just as people who have lost a leg gradually find life bearable in the teeth of being obliged to hobble."

"What an unpleasant analogy, Fred! No, dear, I expect to reap my enjoyment from the consciousness of how very much nicer you are than other men and from being glad that it is so."





VI

AID my predecessor in ownership of the house which I occupy, as we were walking away from the registry, just after the title had passed, "You asked me the other day why we wished to move, and I told you we needed more room. That was true enough ; but the controlling reason is my wife's conviction that we shall never have a boy so long as we live in that block. She began saying so when our fourth girl was born, and we have five girls now. It is a girl block. We have lived there eight years, and during all that time there has been but a single boy baby born in it, and he died within twenty-four hours. As I tell my wife, by moving we can only have another girl at the worst, and on the other hand a change

may break the succession. But very likely you prefer girls."

My preferences on that score at that period were very vague ; yet, in spite of my freedom from superstitions in general, I could not avoid the reflection that it would have been more considerate of my vendor to mention this flaw in the title before the papers were passed, if he felt it incumbent upon him to do so at all. Accordingly, when my wife divulged to me, one day about a year later, that the couple in question, who were living in an adjacent street, had been blessed with twins, and girl twins at that, I was ungenerous enough to wave my dinner napkin around my head and to chant a pæan.

"Perhaps that will remove the spell from our block," said Josephine, yearningly.

"Who knows?" I answered, snatching at the suggestion, for, to tell the truth, by reason doubtless of the very fact that ours was said to be a girl block, we had both set our hearts on having a boy. And although the appalling character of our predecessor's statistics had been somewhat modified by the discovery that

of the twenty houses in our row, several were occupied by old maids, and one by an elderly single gentleman, and several more by people who had no children at all, and at least four by couples whose children were too old to have been born within the specified eight years, the most searching investigation on the part of Josephine had failed to invalidate his testimony regarding the gender in the households where there had been births. As a consequence, she had confided to me more than once that she felt in her bones it would be a girl ; and, though I wore a confident front in her presence, the serenity of my brow could not always dispel the haunting recollection that I had seen men at the club lose a dozen games of whist running, by obstinately sticking to the same seat. Analogously, was it not highly probable that by braving destiny I had entailed upon myself a long line of daughters ?

The birth of little Fred in the teeth of local tradition of parental foreboding was followed at a comparatively short period by the arrival of another son, whose angelic presence—such

is the contrariness of human nature—evoked from his mother, after she and he were comfortably out of the woods, an insinuation to the effect that there might be too much of a good thing.

“You mustn’t think for an instant that I would wish baby to be other than the sweet little cherub he is”—these were her exact words—“but if we should ever have another, Fred, I do hope it will be a girl.”

“If we should have another!” The tentativeness (as the novelists say) of the expression betrayed that even Josephine, with all her eagerness for a daughter, was not without some qualms on the score of adding to our joint parental burdens. It is a common device, both among people who have nothing to do and those whose mission it is to stimulate thrifty instincts in the young, to call attention to the enormous sum total of pennies which results from beginning with a penny, and then doubling the penny, and after multiplying the product by two to continue doubling the successive multiplications once a day for a calendar month. The product is in the millions, if

not billions. While it cannot be said that the responsibilities and expenses of the modern parent mount upward with quite the same fatal facility as in the case of the pennies (let the unmercenary or merely arithmetical substitute horse-shoe nails), there is certainly considerable analogy between the two processes. Leaving aside as too pathological for mention the circumstance, including a monthly nurse at ever so much a minute and meals by herself, which attends the ushering into existence of each successive little stranger, the modern paterfamilias may be said to lay the apex stone of his inverted pyramid by the purchase of a baby-carriage—to be relined and refurbished for each new-comer. And then, O ye gods ! mark how the pyramid mounts and spreads ! From the baby-wagon to the rattle and the woolly horse ; from the woolly horse to the balloon, the tricycle (or a doll which will shut her eyes), and two extra quarts of milk daily ; from extra quarts of milk daily to extra chops and eggs daily, boots and shoes, the kindergarten, rabbits, and puzzling interrogatories to be answered concerning the

Infinite ; from puzzling interrogatories to the safety (?) bicycle (or a doll which will talk), manual training in carpentry, the dancing academy, and patent-leather pumps, plates for the teeth, the whooping-cough, a miniature steam-engine (or a doll's house which is broader than the door-sill), and a detective camera ; from a detective camera—prithce, is it not a goodly pile already ? And yet its proportions are still but a tithe of what will follow. Upward and ever broadening mounts your pyramid until its surface rivals in magnificent area that famous hat of the Quangle Wangle Quee of Lear's ditty :

“ For his hat was one hundred and two feet wide,
With ribbons and bibbons on every side,
And bells and buttons and loops and lace,
So that nobody ever could see the face
Of the Quangle Wangle Quee ! ”

Verily the married man of to-day with a rising family becomes frightened if he allows himself to ponder the situation. He lies awake at night and is disposed to offer a chair to every life-insurance agent who intrudes upon his privacy. And, as Josephine often

says, the worst of it is, there is really nothing to be done about it. Would you have the children wear the same thin flannels all the year round? Do you relish the idea of seeing little Fred arrive at man's estate with crooked front teeth, when by the outlay of a few paltry dollars at the present time they could be made regular as a palisade? Are the sons of Tom, Dick, and Harry to be sent to a summer school in the Adirondacks and ours made to breathe sea-air all the year round? Is little Josephine to go without a kodak when her dearest friend, Polly Dolly Adeline, is pressing the button from morning till night? Assuredly not. Against luxuries we turn a stony countenance; but who will aver that warm underwear, regular front teeth, occasional change of atmosphere, and development of the artistic instincts are not necessities which parents are bound to provide for their offspring?

When destiny finally matched our two boys with a sister apiece—not twins, thank you—discussion between us as to whether sons or daughters are more to be desired became in a

certain sense futile for Josephine and me ; and yet the theme is one which crops up between us with tolerable frequency from the very reason that we are confronted by both horns of the dilemma.

“I don’t think I should have had any particular preference at the beginning for a boy rather than a girl but for that horrid man,” said Josephine, on one occasion. “Of course when he tried to make out that this was a girl street, I became just crazy for a son. Perhaps it *is* rather more satisfactory on the whole to have a boy at the head of the family ; he is impressed early with a sense of responsibility, and that he must look after his sisters for the rest of his life. However, it doesn’t matter very much which comes first, provided you have both. But if you could only have one kind and you had to choose which (fortunately it is decided for us) I should find frightful difficulty in making up my mind. For your sake, Fred, I suppose I should choose a boy. I know it is popularly asserted that fathers are fonder of their daughters than their sons ; but, on the other hand, nearly every

man has a sneaking vanity to preserve the family name from dying out, which would determine him if it came to a choice."

"It might be preferable to have the family name die out rather than to see it dragged in the dust. There is always that risk with sons," I answered, with sententious gravity. "In our walk of life a girl cannot readily misbehave herself to any appreciable extent."

"You would not, however, allow anyone else to suggest the possibility that your boys could turn out so badly," said Josephine. "On the contrary, although you have never said so in precise terms, I am sure you will be disappointed in your heart of hearts if one, or both of them, does not prove very remarkable—a Michael Angelo, or a Darwin, or President of the United States."

"Rather than see a son of mine President of the United States——" I began, diverted from our theme by the invocation of the standard spectral hope which is used to prod the imagination of every youth in the country; but Josephine interrupted the ancestral curse trembling on my lips, by remarking succinctly :

“Nonsense. You don’t believe a word you are going to say, Fred.” She continued, with a reflective air, “I admit that girls are not liable to fail in business, or forge, or drink more wine than is good for them. On the other hand, men can take care of themselves ; but what is there more pitiable than a decayed gentlewoman ? It is all very well to consider the enlarged sphere for feminine activity, and try to comfort one’s self by the thought that they can be hospital nurses, or amanuenses, or reporters, or doctors, or even theatrical managers—I am confident that my girls would shine in any of these capacities if it were absolutely necessary—but I, for one, can’t persuade myself that they are intended for that sort of thing, and I am morally certain that you men will see that they do not grow rich and famous too rapidly in the work to which they are called. It may be that my great-great-granddaughter will be President—not ‘ lady ’ President, if you please—of the United States. But that is a long way off, and in the meantime I should prefer to have my daughters and their daughters protected by a bulwark of railroad

shares from the cold world of competition in manual or mental labor. Decayed gentlewomen were pitiful enough when they were able to eke out their livelihood by putting up peaches and plums and strawberries ; but now that preserves—and really just as good preserves—are put up at factories by the wholesale, they must starve if they stayed at home. Oh, Fred, I sometimes think that you ought to alter your will so as to leave everything to the two girls ; but then I recollect how important it is also that boys should have a little something, so that they need not sacrifice their natural gifts and tastes to the exigencies of bread and butter. A few hundred dollars a year might be the determining factor which would enable one of them to become the second Michael Angelo or Darwin of your fancy, instead of a humdrum bank president, or lawyer, or doctor.”

Although I, for one, have not quite such inflated notions regarding the evolution of my sons as my wife would make out, nevertheless the married man who has renounced delusions on his own account feels at liberty to

indulge his imagination to some extent on the subject of his offspring. Not merely the married man, but the married woman also. Whatever Josephine may asseverate to the contrary, I am confident that she cherishes quite as ardent hopes as I on the score both of her boys and of her girls. We may be a pair of fools, but we cannot avoid a secret conviction that little Fred has a remarkable head and brow which suggest the contour of a Webster, and that our second daughter is likely to take drawing-rooms by storm if her features preserve their present exquisite regularity until maidenhood. Then take our younger boy. I admit that he has neither the masterly physiognomy nor the commanding aspect of his brother, but it is from just such habits of absorbing industry and from just such original traits that the capacity of a—a—well, call it a Michael Angelo or a Darwin and be done with it—is developed. Then again there is our elder daughter. She could not be called handsome to-day, perhaps, but those who deem her plain and say that she is all legs and arms may well afford to bear in mind the

story of the Ugly Duckling which from being the butt of the barn-yard proved to be a swan. And even if she fail to be strictly beautiful, a girl with her serene intelligence and vitalizing enthusiasm is almost certain to make her mark in this era of feminine progression.

When comparing mine with other children I freely confess to a sensation of pride, which Josephine has assured me is common to parents in general. She declares that our opposite neighbor, who has seven girls—a listless, lanky set—is not a whit less proud of his progeny than I of mine. I could scarcely believe this to be the case until I happened to condole with him one day, when we were walking down-town together, on the size of his family and the circumstance that he had no sons. To my astonishment he replied:

“ Bless your heart ! I wouldn’t part with one of them. And between you and me and the post, my dear sir, there are not seven other girls their peers in the entire country. Boys ? If I had a son I should live in con-

stant dread that he would blow his head off or be drowned while he was growing up, and when he was grown up that he would go to the demnition bow-wows. Boys? No, thank you you, neighbor."

Two or three rebuffs of this kind have inclined me to believe that whatever the predilections of parents beforehand, they accept the inevitable with a fortitude which soon becomes fond devotion to their fate. I have rarely seen seven less attractive girls; yet when I say so to my wife she is apt to taunt me with the insinuation that our friend across the way probably entertains similar views on the subject of our darlings.

"But in the first place, Josephine, we have four, two boys and two girls—an ideal combination—and he has seven long, lanky girls, and no boys at all."

"He has told you plainly that he would not part with one of them for the world, and that he abhors the sight of a boy, and he is thoroughly in earnest in what he says."

"Surely, my dear, you don't maintain that there is any comparison in point of looks,

manners, or brains between our children and his ? ”

“ Not the slightest, Fred. You know my opinion regarding those girls perfectly well ; but you can’t blame him, poor man, for not seeing that they are an unattractive, homely set, any more than people would be disposed to blame you because you are convinced that little Fred will some day set the world afire.”

“ But he is likely to ; or—er—if not to set it afire exactly, to——”

“ Of course he will, the darling ! ” broke in my wife, with a bubbling laugh. “ You are too delicious for anything, Fred. You insist not only that your geese are all swans, but you expect the world to agree with you. Now I am just as confident as you that our children are remarkable, and no amount of argument could abate a jot or tittle my faith in their future ; but at the same time I have not the hardihood to demand that other people should take the same view. You are a veritable parental ostrich, Fred ; quite as complete a one as your friend across the street,

who is very likely at this moment to be priding himself on the fact that none of his seven have red hair, and pitying us because David and Josie have conspicuously gory locks."

"Pooh!" I answered, stiffly. "Josie's hair is a beautiful shade of auburn; any one of his girls might be proud to have hair like it. And as for David's, it is a good, honest color, if it is red."

"There you go again, my dear. So are blue and green honest colors, and yet you could scarcely call——"

"Pshaw!" I interrupted, with a slightly irritated air. Even Josephine has a way of arguing at times which is decidedly nettlesome.

Faults? Imperfections? There are days when the most completely infatuated father looks gloomily askance at his offspring; when it seems to him that their disadvantageous points stick out so prominently as to overshadow their attractions, and he almost wishes they had never been born. A cold in the head, an unbecoming costume, or nothing at

all will transform my namesake into a stolid-looking little ruffian whom I find difficulty in recognizing; and as Josephine says, the children are sure to look their worst when you wish them to look their best. She declares that I always select the most unpropitious times for exhibiting them; for instance, just after they have finished supper or been on their hands and knees in the nursery all the afternoon, and she is disposed to rate me for exhibiting them at any time on the ground that nine people out of ten who come to the house would prefer not to see them. However this may be, I have noticed that, whereas they will be excruciatingly polite to any chance person who happens in, they seem to take a fiendish satisfaction in ignoring or merely grunting at your bosom friend or the judge of the Supreme Court whom you have asked to dinner. And if, by some happy freak, they acquit themselves creditably so far as manners are concerned, is not one invariably tempted to apologize for little Fred's suddenly developed squint, or Winona's unusual lack of color?

It is on the occasions when the children are looking and behaving their worst that visitors are most apt to call attention to their resemblance either to my wife or me. However much you may inwardly resent such an imputation at the moment, it is not easy in these days, when the law of heredity is on everyone's lips, to escape noting with considerable horror, as time goes on, the reproduction of your own or your mother-in-law's peculiarities. When Josephine says that little Fred will not sit up straight at table because he inherits my rooted tendency to sprawl, I am apt to reply, if in a pesky mood, that David gets his red hair from his maternal great-grandmother. In this matter of inherited traits, be it said, a man can bear with far more complacency the reappearance of his own ancestral failings, than those which appertain to his wife's family tree. Though there may be room for argument as to whether little Fred's furious temper (he had a way, when small, of lying on his back and kicking at the least provocation) was transmitted through Josephine's blood or mine, there is

not the slightest doubt that our eldest daughter derives her double chin from the old lady, my wife's great aunt, whose portrait in a turban hangs in our dining-room. If it be tolerably dispiriting to note one's own foibles coming to light in the second generation, it is far more so to encounter idiosyncrasies with which you have no association, and for which, therefore, you keep no tender spot in your heart. I have a fellow sympathy with little Fred's tendency to sprawl, and his disinclination to get up in time for breakfast ; but I tell Josephine, when she accounts for Winona's abhorrence of oysters, by the tradition that two of her own aunts could not abide shellfish in any form, that they were a precious pair of donkeys.

“ If they were your aunts, though,” said Josephine to me one day with some warmth, “ you would think it the most natural thing in the world, just as you always grandiloquently describe your ancestor who used to execute people as ‘ the sheriff of the county,’ whereas, if he had been mine, you would be sure to speak of him as a common hangman.”

There are occasions when Josephine betrays a degree of excitement disproportionate to the necessities of the situation.





VII

I RETALIATED on my wife for naming little Fred after me by naming Josie after her. Josephine declared I might talk until I was black in the face, but she never would consent to name her eldest son after anyone but his father. When I referred to the confusion which would result from the presence in the house of two people with the same name, she tossed her head and said that it would be easy to obviate that by calling me Frederick instead of Fred. She added that Frederick was much more dignified and appropriate to the father of a family, and that she had been intending to make the substitution ever since we were married.

To tell the truth, I did not relish the threat-

ened change. When a man has answered to a name for more than a quarter of a century, it is rather appalling to be informed that if he answers to it henceforth he is likely to confound himself with an infant. On the previous occasions when Josephine had solemnly declared her intention to exorcise Fred, I had smiled inwardly, feeling sure that she would forget to begin; but it was obvious to me now, that, for the sake of baby, she was prepared to school her tongue and the tongues of all my relations and friends in the execution of her fell purpose. Imagine Harry Bolles and other kindred spirits calling me stiff, august Frederick ! I vowed that this should not be brought to pass, and having become convinced that it was simply a question of time when my son and heir would be christened after me, I graciously consented to send for the clergyman on the distinct understanding that I was to remain Fred to the end of time, confusion to the contrary notwithstanding.

Our second boy was christened David, after his maternal grandfather. When our elder daughter was born I proclaimed firmly my

purpose to name her for her mother. Josephine squirmed like an eel, metaphorically speaking, at the suggestion, and I discovered for the first time that she had detested her own name from early childhood. She argued that there was no sense in calling a girl after her mother, for the reason that no advantage of association, as in the case of a father, could possibly be derived from it, and that she would have sufficient trouble, as time went on, in keeping my underwear distinct from little Fred's without being confronted by a similar difficulty on the feminine side of the house.

"On the other hand," I murmured, with an accession of sentiment which brought a blush to her cheeks despite her predisposition to frown, "my dearest wish is to see another Josephine in the flesh, complete even to the name. Moreover, as you have had full scope twice already, it is only fair that I should be allowed for once to carry out my own ideas."

So Josephine she was christened, though we call her Josie, and I have very little doubt that my wife in the depths of her inner conscious-

ness would have been bitterly disappointed if the child had been given any other name.

When number four appeared—our second daughter—Josephine declared that she was tired of family names and wished something out of the common run. After mooning about the house for a day or two with pencil and paper, she handed me the following list embodying the fruit of her cogitation : Ethel, Enid, Corinne, Dorothy, Gladys, Margery, Millicent, Annabel, and Letitia. She spared me, however, the necessity of criticism by stating that not one of them would do; that every other child nowadays was named Gladys, Dorothy, or Margery; that Ethel did not hit her fancy, and that the rest were hideous.

“Why don’t you call her plain Mary?” I asked, by way of a suggestion.

“The child will be plain enough, I dare say,” said my wife, dryly. “I am quite aware,” she added, “that we shall be in a certain sense gambling with divine Providence in giving the darling a conspicuous, individualizing name, for she may grow up common-

place-looking or a fright ; but we must take some chances in life, mustn't we, Fred ? ”

“ Either Rosamond, Eleanor, or Guendolen is appropriate to a beauty,” said I, with non-committal subserviency.

“ I should prefer something more original. A man with your training in the classics ought to be able to rattle off half a dozen that would be suitable. Try, dear, to think of some.”

Having obediently ransacked the recesses of my mental store-house, and consulted on the sly a mythological dictionary and the Bible, including the Apocrypha, I reported progress as follows: “ Ceres, Naomi, Diana, Jael, Andromeda, Niobe, and Cleopatra.”

“ ‘ Like Niobe all tears,’ ” murmured Josephine, reflectively. “ They would bother her life out by quoting that at her, I suppose. I had thought of Pallas. Why wouldn't Pallas do, Fred ? I don't know a Pallas, and it sounds rather distinguished. As I remember her, she was entirely respectable. Cleopatra is pretty, but the trouble is that she wasn't entirely respectable.”

“ Why Pallas rather than Pocahontas ? ”

I asked, with sober mien but sardonic purport.

“Pocahontas?” screamed my darling. But presently she added, with a musing air: “A really pretty Indian name wouldn’t be bad at all. Minnehaha? No, that’s too hackneyed.”

“Tuscarora?” I hazarded. “A little too bold and expansive, perhaps.”

“Yes, dear, I think that ‘Tuscarora’ would frighten away the average suitor.”

“Cacouna, then?”

“Ugh!”

“Oneida?”

“I don’t like it.”

“Winona? There! Why wouldn’t that be just the thing? It is picturesque and original, and to my ears decidedly fetching.”

“Winona?” queried Josephine, in a pensive tone which suggested that it had rather caught her fancy. “It’s queer, Fred, but it *is* fetching and picturesque as you say, and decidedly original. I should like to sleep on it.”

On the fourth morning after this she informed me, with a beatific smile, that the matter was settled; she had heard a mysteri-

ous voice in her sleep, on three consecutive nights, cry aloud—"Winona—Winona—Winona."

"I regard that as the interposition of Providence," she added, "and if the child grows up homely and puny and utterly out of keeping with her name, I shall consider that I have been very shabbily treated by fate.

It is amazing how soon the pig-like, rubicund objects of parental solicitude, which erst bent upon you their steel-blue eyes and wailed, develop a marked personality of their own. The married man with sons of four or five years is likely to suffer himself to be jabbed with a yard-stick in his bath, morning after morning, under the guise of a hippopotamus at bay, in order to cater to the sporting tastes of one, and to croon the same ditty a dozen times in monotonous succession for the sake of edifying the lyrical instincts of another. What spinster can appreciate a mother's joy at the discovery that her doll of flesh and blood has teeth like everybody else? What bachelor can understand the complacency of the father who divines from the first articulate

word that his heir is not completely an idiot? Close upon the heels of evolution follows the bubbling refrain of parental ecstasy. You stand amazed with delight before the first witticism and dub it clever enough for *Life* or *Punch*; you scan with dancing eyes the bird's nest of clay bestowed upon you as a birthday present, and whisper to your wife that the Liliputian donor has a sculptor's eye and fingers.

Simultaneously with this spirit of wonder at the normal development of your offspring, and with your cognizance of the individuality of each, arises within you the desire and almost rabid intention to equip them as completely as possible for the struggle of existence, to disguise and fortify the weak spots left by destiny, and to foster the talents with which Dame Nature has endowed them. You are determined that the mistakes committed in your own education shall not be duplicated in theirs, and bent on acting with consummate wisdom, you consult current authorities on child culture and lend an alert ear to every suggestion in the line of hygienic or pedagogic

reform. You purse your lips in the throes of indecision as to whether or not baby shall wear shoes and socks. You cite having worn them yourself, forsooth, and that your own feet, save for a pet corn or two, have been, and are, to all intents and all purposes, available, and you indulge in horrible imaginings on the score of influenza and lockjaw; but you sigh when your wife asks if you set yourself up as wiser than the doctors, who insist that the young should return to the customs of nature, and like as not, before another week you are leading your precious toddler barefoot along the flinty pavement with a superior smile. What though you have been taught to spell cat c-a-t! Do you not bow your head to the superior wisdom of the age, which asserts that it should be spelt cah-ah-te, and rejoice that your young hopefuls are not being outstripped by their contemporaries? Yea, verily; and though you yourself could read when you were five, you even humbly subscribe to the doctrine that if a child reads at eight it is time enough, provided that until then he is beguiled by grewsome kindergarten carols

and the manufacture of paper patch-work for the presentation to an admiring household at Christmas-tide. Painfully conscious that you have failed to make the most of your own life, you are eager to afford your children every opportunity to improve upon it, albeit at the sacrifice of your most stalwart and fundamental convictions.

What parent would restore the days when a father was addressed on paper as "Honored Sir," and the offending scion of his stock slunk up the stairs in apprehension of the rod? Not I, for one. And yet, as Josephine says, it is not exactly pleasant to be snuffed out at forty by the superior wisdom of the rising generation, even though that wisdom be tempered by affectionate toleration of nominal control. Nevertheless, after you have grown accustomed to the idea that you are, comparatively speaking, an ignoramus, and that your experience of life is to be rated merely as so much fustiness, is not abundant satisfaction to be derived from the pride one takes in the superseding knowledge of one's progeny? Even though you may feebly protest at the

ruthless sweeping away of established codes by the youth of twelve and the miss of fifteen, you feel puffed up by the amazing enlightenment of your sons and daughters. As time goes on, you positively glow with satisfaction at each successive display of information or theory which controverts the truth upon which you have acted all your days. You scratch your head and learn with wondering delight that William Tell was a mythical humbug, that the novels of Sir Walter are rather a bore than otherwise, and that all illness is hallucination. If, tempted to defend the wisdom of the past, you proffer the testimony of books, you yield respectfully to the triumphant plea of a newer edition or a later authority, wherein the facts or arguments on which you relied are contradicted or exploded. What glorious opportunities are given you to examine and rehabilitate your moral standards by the searching light of modern philosophy ! You are informed by lips on which the dawn of manhood is scarcely perceptible, that competition in trade is akin to crime ; that the proletariat should be restrained by legislation from generating children faster

than it can provide for them, and that, owing to the failing powers of the sun, our world will in a comparatively short period become too cold to inhabit. And if, under the spur of a whimsical mood, you venture to insinuate that this world has long been a cold one for the average inhabitant, the sad, sickly smile with which your witticism is received convicts you of levity and a disposition to make light of serious subjects. Indeed, there is something charmingly pathetic, even if occasionally irritating, in the tacit criticism of your whole course in life which you read written on the grave countenances of your sons and daughters. Pathetic, and yet at the same time mirth-provoking, in spite of more or less justice, by virtue of the glorious self-delusion. You are in their eyes the fond and loving father, but equally the humdrum practical man of affairs governed by workaday considerations, and void of poetic impulse save mere domesticity. Unlike them you have never tried to probe the secrets of eternity and grappled with the fire spirits of thought. To you the moon has been but a night lamp and no

inspirer of mighty resolutions and world-conquering hopes. You have lived always as now, a struggler for bread and butter, a creature of dull routine, getting up and lying down, eating and drinking, spending and saving, thermometer and watch consulting, with a tedious regularity of which they do not intend to be guilty. They adore you for the loving care you have lavished upon them and the opportunities you have given them, but their eyes let you understand, though they would fain spare your feelings, that whereas your feet have ever clung to earth, their look is fixed upon the stars. Glorious self-delusion which, even while it castigates, tickles the parental diaphragm ! Upon the stars ! God grant that their look never swerve.

Said I to Josephine one evening, as we were sitting side by side on the sofa after our darling critics had gone to bed—"One would suppose that you and I, in the bygone days, had never sailed the seas of fantasy with the Corsair, or apostrophized solitude on the mountain-top with Childe Harold ; that we had bowed in the dust before ancestral dogma, and

clung to the belief that the ' Animals went in two by two, the elephant and the kangaroo ; ' that philanthropy was a strange word to us ; that we had reveled in defective drainage, and that we did not kiss each other when we were engaged."

" Poor little dears," said my wife, " how much they have still to learn ! It would break their hearts if they had to know now that in the end they would be only just a little better than we. Do you remember how you used to repeat :

" ' Not once or twice in our rough island-story
The path of duty was the way to glory.
He that walks it only thirsting
For the right and learns to deaden
Love of self, before his journey closes
He shall see the stubborn thistle bursting
Into glossy purples which outredden
All voluptuous garden-roses.' "

" And yet," said I, " I am only a hard-working and tolerably impecunious lawyer."



VIII

THE married man with a family who is dependent on the income from his labors for a living, is necessarily a creature of routine. Day in day out he rises from bed, hones his razor, takes his bath, swallows his breakfast, reads the newspaper, and hies him down town with the monotonous exactness of a pendulum. He is engrossed by the cares of business until four or five o'clock in the afternoon, and in the brief interim between his closing time and his dinner hour he walks, rides, or frequents the gymnasium for exercise, plays whist, visits a picture gallery and the book-stores, pays a call or attends a committee meeting in the interest of political or charitable reform, and reaches home barely in time to become a bear

for the amusement of his children before they drop off to sleep. In the evening he dines out now and then, and now and then he takes his wife to the theatre or a concert ; but ordinarily, after exhausting the newspaper at home and cutting the pages of the current magazines, he settles down to read the newest volume of biography or travel, and is aroused by his wife an hour later on the plea that if he sleeps longer he will lie awake at night.

It is only on Sundays and holidays that the busy man of affairs escapes from the clutches of inexorable custom, and even these respites from habit are so fleeting that he has barely begun to realize that he is free before they have passed and he is a slave again. And yet how precious in his regard, in spite of their limitations, do these breathing spells from routine become as the years advance, and he has grown a trifle sober, and almost imperceptibly gray ! There are the baked beans and fish-balls of New England to begin with, to enhance the comfort of his late, leisurely breakfast. The bits of Shakespeare and Shel-

ley with which, stretched at his ease, he refreshes the dusty dryness of his spirit, well up in his memory through the week, and until another Thanksgiving or Decoration Day his eyes are brighter for their glimpses of meadow and hillock, and his lungs are sounder for their inspiration of purer air. Does he not begrudge the passage of the fly-swift hours during which he learns to know his little ones from their own lips, when out of sight of pavements he wanders with them through the wood, or teaches them to paddle up the suburban stream? Avaunt the Sunday newspaper with its vampire wings, and the stuffy club with its corrosive sublimate of brandy and soda! He yearns more and more for the weekly boon of exchanging the paraphernalia of workaday existence for the simple pleasures of loving comradeship with his family, and contact with nature so far as she is to be encountered within the radius of a sabbath day's journey.

But the Mecca of the married man's hopes is his annual vacation, so called from the deeply-rooted intention in his soul to make it a

yearly occurrence ; but which is ordinarily interfered with three years out of five, notwithstanding his proneness to prophesy glibly that other men, who neglect to shut their desks for a reasonable period in the course of every twelvemonth, will surely break down. It is a splendid theory for other men to act upon, and still more splendid for yourself at those rare conjunctions when there is perfect composure alike in the business world and in your domestic household. You pack your rods and feverishly order relays of groceries—and then something turns up which obliges you to change your plans and put off until another year your projected outing in the woods, where not even a telegram will reach you. It may be that you are called upon to act as the assignee of an insolvent estate, the pickings from which will be considerable, or that the children break out with the measles, or that you discover the entire drainage system of your house to be in need of immediate overhauling. Under any of these circumstances a married man must stay at home. He cannot afford to neglect his business, or to desert his

family in distress. Hence, in spite of his rigid principles, he is very apt to persuade himself that, by passing the summer at some watering-place accessible from town by a dusty, daily railway journey, he is getting all the vacation he needs, especially because he reaches home occasionally, on the hottest afternoons, by three instead of five.

“Are you all ready?” you inquire of your wife, entering her room in a flurry some day about the middle of June, having just come post-haste from down town.

“Are we really going?”

“Going? Of course we are going. The carriage will be at the door in less than an hour.”

“Considering that I have had to pack three times during the past fortnight as a consequence of as many determinations on your part which you have subsequently reconsidered, you can scarcely blame me for asking the question. I shall be ready, dear.”

“We are going without fail this time. I have bought the tickets and telegraphed for guides, and told them at the office that I

shan't be back for three weeks. Has that man sent my fishing things ? ”

“ A great many things have come for you.”

You cast a searching, ruffled glance around you at the profusion of packages occupying the lounge and the floor, and realize from their respective proportions that your rubber coat, a new bamboo rod, a landing-net, an air-cushion for yourself and another for your darling, some groceries, and a box of fly-ointment have arrived. Something is plainly missing, however, from the agonized fashion in which you drop upon your knees and rummage through the bundles, ripping the twine and paper from each with increasing despair.

“ Where is my new reel and line ? That brute has neglected to send either them or the trout flies I ordered. I will sue him ; I——”

As you fulminate, you glare at your wife with the ferocity of an incensed tiger ; it is the sudden guilty quailing of her eyes which checks your objurgations. At the same moment she stoops and ducks her head to the base of the lounge, and after groping with the yardstick

produces the missing articles, remarking nonchalantly that the baby had been playing with them, and must have pushed them underneath.

You are so glad to get them that you merely growl inarticulately while you undo with eager fingers the precious package. You scrutinize the dainty rubber reel with a contented smile, and in the serenity of recovered good nature dart at the box of fly-ointment, and insist that your wife shall take a smell of the horrible-looking mixture of pennyroyal and tar. She declares that she abominates the odor and that she would rather be bitten by all the flies in creation than soil her skin with a drop of it, and you answer that you are rather fond of the smell and that it is really remarkably clean stuff.

While she collects and packs your things you go flitting about the room with a brow wrinkled by the conviction that you have forgotten something fundamental, and your heart dances like a daffodil as you come across your tooth-brush in the last five minutes. Just when the carriage is at the door you bound up the

stairs two steps at a time for your watch-key, which you have left on your pin-cushion, and you breathlessly vow on your return that you will buy a stem-winding watch with your next spare cash. In consequence of the cabman's announcement that you have no time no lose if you wish to catch the train, your farewell to your children in the hall is a hasty nip, and you arraign your wife for the more profuse osculations which she is lavishing upon them. You are off at last, thank goodness, with the memory of four heads and noses pressed against the window-pane in the final exuberance of god-speed.

Happy is the benedict who feels that his vacation is incomplete without the society of his gentle spouse ! Happy too is the spouse who is not so gentle as to be deterred by bugaboos in the shape of fears of what may befall her children during her absence, or by antipathy for the discomforts of the pathless woods from accompanying her husband ! It is well-nigh impossible to overcome the nervousness of many women sufficiently to induce them to leave home for more than a day or two at a

time. There is, moreover, a considerable number of the softer sex whose constitutional horror of snakes and the kindred accessories of a sylvan outing, remains paramount to every other consideration. I am happy to state that Josephine is blessed with a certain serenity of nature which enables her to abandon her offspring for moderate periods without perturbation, and merely to lift her skirts and run without screaming when she encounters a reptile.

It seems almost like your wedding journey over again as you are whirled along in the train by the side of your sweet partner, and in the exuberance of this romantic suggestion you whisper, "Do you suppose, dear, that they take us for a newly married couple?"

"What a perfect goose you are, Fred! Don't flatter yourself that you can shuffle off the staid aspect of a *paterfamilias* of forty simply by turning the key on the children."

"Dear little souls!" I ejaculate. "Wouldn't it be nice if we had been able to bring one or two of them with us?"

"No, it wouldn't," answers Josephine, flatly. "I was just thinking what a perfect

blessing it was to be completely free from them for a fortnight, and all alone with my dearest."

Thereupon her head drops involuntarily upon my shoulder, where it reposes until I can no longer resist the temptation of remarking, "I think we pass very well for a newly married pair."

"You nasty thing, Fred!" she retorts, bobbing bolt upright as though electrified. "Just as I was so comfortable, too!"

Neither argument nor flattery can induce her to resume her superincumbent posture; but finally, perhaps, she relents so far as to permit you to hold her hand. On goes the train whizzing and jolting into the twilight, which fades away into a pitchy landscape illumined now and again by twinkling cottage lights, and now by the glare of urban electricity. Puff! Pouff! You glide into a smoke-vaulted station where the vernacular of the attendant populace smacks of apple-pie and cider. Whir-r! Sh-h! You rumble across a bridge from which you catch the glimpse below of swift, black water, and in another minute you

are shooting past a foundry whose chimneys belch splendid tongues of fire.

“How little Fred would delight in that!” murmurs my angel.

“I thought the children were a forbidden subject.”

Only a gentle pressure of my hand for answer. On, on we jostle through the night. The tireless engine twists and turns through mountain valleys from the sides of which forests of pine send down impenetrable gloom. There is a colder, fresher savor to the air as you step to the door to ascertain why the train has suddenly come to a standstill.

“Only a cow on the track,” passes from mouth to mouth after a few moments of suspense, during which a vision of your orphaned children floats pathetically before your mind’s eye. Josephine does not need to be told what you are thinking about, as witness her pensive query after the train is once more under way.

“I wonder, Fred, if they would care just a little if we were telescoped.”

Eleven o’clock. Only twenty minutes more and you will be due at the little jumping-off

place where you are to pass the night, and from which you are to set out for camp in the morning. You begin to be harassed by doubts as to whether your telegram has been received, which are not allayed until the countenance of Pete, your sometime Indian Guide, looms from the platform. He wastes no words ; his grin, welcome in spite of its stolidity, and the shake of his hand give way to the obligation of possessing himself of all your traps. Still he eyes the white woman furtively until you find leisure to remark, " Pete, this is my wife, and Josephine, my dear, this is Pete."

Introductions to Josephine follow of mine host of the inn, whom I congratulate on the improvements in his rattle-trap, and, after we have inspected our room, of Pete's younger brother, Oscar, who is to be the pilot of her canoe, and whose sole exemption from immobility appears to be a guttural grunt. I put searching questions to Pete regarding our chances of good sport, the replies to which are diplomatically non-committal, and then we seek our chamber to woo slumber on behalf of an early start.

Slumber? Would that expectation were father to reality! What inducement to repose is to be found in blankets narrower by six inches than the width of the bed requires? Two minutes after you have tucked yourself in gloriously about the shoulders—for the mountain air feels just a trifle chilly—a gentle tug destroys your handiwork. Without delay you give a resolute tug in the opposite direction, and immediately the voice of your darling protests.

“What are you doing, Fred? You have not left me an inch of bed-clothes.”

Another tug, still gentle but more determined than the first accompanies her words, arousing the spirit of evil within you.

“Confound it all, it’s a perfect outrage to give us a bed like this,” I reply, springing up with a kick which destroys whatever semblance of order there is left, and I strike a match viciously.

I raise the kerosene lamp, and by its dim light morosely survey the situation.

“What are you trying to do, Fred?” my darling inquires, as I stride past the bed.

I am really in search of my ulster, which is hanging at the other end of the room, but it suddenly occurs to me to slip back the bolt of the connecting door which leads into the adjoining chamber.

“I’m going to sleep in the next room,” I reply, gruffly.

“But there may be someone in there already,” cries Josephine, sitting up in bed under the spur of her trepidation.

“I don’t care if there is,” I answer, with a defiant mien resulting from secret belief that the apartment in question is empty. Thereupon I pull at the door, which sticks hard.

“You will wake the whole house. And oh, Fred, what if there should be anyone in there !”

I tie a towel around the knob and pull lustily. The door yields at last and, flying open, reveals only the silence of the tomb. I enter holding the lamp high above my head, and my horrified eyes behold a bed completely stripped of everything save the striped mattress and bolster appropriate to a dismantled chamber. For one fell, furious moment I stand irresolute,

then with a mighty stride I return to my own room, and seizing my ulster and certain other belongings, exclaim with stoical calm:

“Good-night, Josephine.”

“Oh, Fred, I hate to have you leave me. Let me sleep in there and you here. It is your vacation and you need all the rest you can get. Are you sure the bed is comfortable?”

“I am going to sleep there,” I answer with diplomatic firmness, stooping to kiss her.

“You must barricade the door so that if it is anyone else’s room no one can get in.”

Anyone else’s room! From the chill stuffiness of the atmosphere it seems as though it had been without an inmate for years. I wrap my ulster around me and do up my toes in my flannel shirt, and stretch myself on the straw mattress. Ruminating, I gradually acquire warmth, until a steady, far off murmur assures me that my darling is asleep at last. Then I sleep too.

A few hours later we are peacefully skimming over the waters of the lake. Civilization lies behind us hidden by a bend. Re-

clining with an air of supreme comfort in our respective canoes, we smile now and again at each other across the scarcely ruffled gap which separates us. It is a cloudless morning. The profile of the old man of the mountain, to which Pete calls our attention as we pass, stands out with clean-cut distinctness. A brace of sheldrake race by us almost within gunshot with plaintive squawk. The hills look glorious in their garb of fresh green, and we screw our eyes to make out far away the barely discernible passage between them beyond which lies the virgin forest where we are to spend a fortnight out of reach of newspapers and the children.

Our canoes are laden almost to the gunnel with our kit, comprising tents, woollen and rubber blankets, a cooking-stove, a trunk—Josephine had insisted on bringing a trunk—canned soups, our rods, and a camera. By twilight all these have been safely landed by Pete and the guttural Oscar at the spot chosen as a camping ground—a beatific spot on the margin of the smallest and most picturesque of a trio of connecting lakes. Tall, majestic trees

arch over us, but not too densely. A cool brook twinkles close at hand. Through a fringed clearing we behold across a black-blue sheet of water a monarch among mountains, whose stern sides run down to meet the lake in sheer walls rugged with scars from the glacier period.

Our tents rise side by side in snowy amplitude. Within our guides spread layers of red-olent hemlock and adjust cheese-cloth nettings to baffle the predatory sand-fly. While Oscar builds a noble fire, Pete deftly strips layers of bark from the attendant birches and fashions a dining-table, which charms the fancy of Josephine so that she thrills with the threat of carrying home rolls upon rolls of birch-bark for the little ones. In an ecstasy of content we watch the saffron sunset fade to soft violet and the first stars peep from the pellucid sky. I lie stretched at full length, glorying in the consciousness of rest and of freedom from care and contact with the workaday world. My wife and I, ever lovers, seemed to have usurped the realm of poetry for our sole use. And yet perhaps my lips are mute. Shall I

tell her in bald speech that her eyes are more tender and trusting than the evening planet o'erhead, and her soul purer than the golden light of the departing day ?

“Supper !”

The voice of Pete breaks in upon my shy meditation. We seat ourselves beneath a rustic canopy to feast ourselves on plenty : on fresh trout and fried eggs and collops of toast, whereat it may be our noses would have turned up in wonderment at home, but which we attack with the vigor of primitive man. We drink pannikins of tea strong as lye, and fearlessly ask for more. Thrice at least since the canoes touched shore has Josephine derided my countenance, copper-colored from its coating of tar and oil, and called heaven to witness that she disowned me as a husband ; but now at length the hour of my triumph arrives.

“Fred !” she ejaculates, breaking down completely, “give me some of that stuff. They are all over me ; they are driving me crazy ; in my ears, in my nostrils, in my mouth, and on both sides of my buttered toast. I cannot bear it a moment longer.”

I bid Pete build a smudge and I hasten to my tent for the precious mixture. Josephine essays it gingerly.

“A little dab like that will be of no use,” I exclaim firmly, and suiting the action to the word I baptize her delicate cheeks with glorious smears of the oleaginous compound, remarking withal as a sop to her outraged spirit that it is excellent for the complexion.

On the morrow we fish. On the morrow and on succeeding days. I and Josephine also. I with a fly-rod to the end, and she with a fly-rod for five minutes, during which she succeeds in hooking Oscar in the cheek and entangling herself well-nigh inextricably in her own casting line. After this she prefers to troll, and she trolls indefatigably. That is, she reclines with a graceful pose in her canoe and suffers herself to be piloted from lake to lake. A rod is over her shoulder and a novel in her lap. She reads a little and she dozes a little, and when she feels a twitch, she twitches sooner or later in her turn. It is wonderful how many fish she manages to capture in this haphazard way, and, what is more, the largest

monsters in the lake seek her hook. She reels them in in a seraphic fashion to the delight of Oscar and no less of Pete, who confides to me that my wife is a born fisherman. I realize that this encomium embodies a tacit reflection on my own lack of science, not to be gainsaid by tales of quondam victories over muscalonge, salmon, and tarpon. It is very evident that I must be content to occupy in his eyes a rank completely second to the sweet angel of my bosom, who knows not the difference between a Brown Hackle and a Parmachenee Belle, and who frankly admits a preference for live bait.

The days glide imperceptibly. There is a delicious sameness in them all, and yet each has its special charm. We angle and we meditate ; we paddle and we vegetate. We make all-day excursions, and in the course of them take luncheon on tight little islands solitary enough to arouse the envy of an Alexander Selkirk. We recall and quote poetry of which we have not thought for years. We photograph each other and our guides in every conceivable attitude, and our camp from every

point of view. Josephine sees a pair of huge fiery eyes peering into her tent in the middle of the night, and will not be persuaded (even unto this day) that the intruder was a rabbit and not a bear. By the camp-fire Oscar exhibits to me Josephine's new fly-rod splintered through contact with his weight in stepping backward, and articulates philosophically, "Lady no fly fish ; lady troll. Gentleman buy another when home. Indian mend pretty good perhaps."

We bathe and cleanse our souls in the holy atmosphere of the summer evening, and once more, as in the days of our youth, we gaze between the solemn pines at the lustrous night seeking the infinite. We whisper "peccavi" to the pitying stars, and in the consciousness of lack of power to pierce the mysteries of cosmos, my hand seeks hers and hers mine in token of the love for the sake of which alone we crave immortality.

There comes a day when the walls of our tents fall like the walls of the houses of Jericho at the voice of the prophet's triumphet. I take apart my rods, and Josephine arms herself with

the vast collection of ferns and the rolls of birch-bark which she purposes to carry home with her. Mournfully we take a last look from our canoes at our dismantled camping-ground ; yet already my wife's eyes are bright with the thought of seeing the children again, and I am beginning to wonder what has been going on in the civilized world during the past fortnight. We are sorry to be going, and yet we are glad. Josephine stigmatizes the rapture with which I receive a bundle of newspapers from a sportsman whom we pass on our way out as hysterical and almost indecent.

“ It was only a fortnight ago that you said you never wished to look at another newspaper, Fred.”

“ And you, my dear, that it was a perfect blessing to be rid of the children,” I retort, and then I absorb myself in the affairs of the body politic, oblivious alike of lake and forest.





AID my wife to me one morning, just after the arrival of the postman, "Julia is going to pay us a nice, long visit."

"I'm glad to hear it," I answered, cheerily. Julia is my wife's only sister, who lives in the suburbs and has been in the habit of staying with us for a month or so during the winter ever since we have been man and wife. She is an attractive girl, but is less comely than Josephine and not so sagacious. In fact she has always seemed to me rather flighty. Still, as girls go, she is decidedly prepossessing, and I am very fond of her, notwithstanding the fact that Josephine invariably collapses after she has gone, as the result of her stay.

“ Julia will be nineteen the twenty-sixth of December,” continued my wife reflectively.

“ I remember, dear, that she has labored all her life under the misfortune of a birthday so near Christmas that people made one present do double duty. I have always thought it was very hard on Julia.”

“ Well, considering the hardship of her case,” said my wife, boldly, taking advantage of my sportive mood, “ what do you think of giving her a party ? ”

“ A party ? ” I faltered.

“ Yes. Julia comes out this winter, you know. Mamma is too delicate to take on her own shoulders the entire brunt of the wear and tear involved, and I should like to do what I can to help. Besides, we have been married now ten years, and have accepted so many invitations without returning them that I am almost ashamed to look people in the face. It was all very well not to entertain until we had an excuse, but we shall never have another excuse so good as this until Josie comes out.”

I will frankly confess that I have failed to

experience the compunctions as to looking my acquaintances in the face referred to by Josephine. It has never occurred to me to quail in the presence of the long line of social benefactors who have proffered us hospitality during the last decade in the form of dinners, cottillons, and evening receptions. People entertain because they or their wives feel an inclination so to do, and considering that I have very often dragged myself to their festivities despite every inclination to remain at home, I feel that I am entitled to cry "quits" on the score of obligation. Moreover, Josephine's strictures were by no means just, as I hastened to point out to her. Surely she had not forgotten the huge kettledrum and two smaller teas, by means of which she had killed off her entire visiting list? Had not her sewing-circle eaten us out of house and home biennially since we had plighted our troth at the altar? Then, too, in point of dinner company I was ready to challenge comparison with almost any one of my contemporaries. How often had I aroused her ire by bringing home a friend to share pot-luck without even tele-

phoning to her that he was coming, so that she could send to the butcher's shop around the corner, which we patronize only in case of exigency, for an extra brace of chops or a head of lettuce ! At least she would bear witness to the dinner-party we gave in the second year of our married life to my old chum Gorham Delany on his wedding-trip, when I maintained that champagne was far more indispensable than an extra girl to wait and she exactly the opposite ?

“ And we ended by having both,” broke in Josephine, with a tragic air. “ Oh, I know, Fred,” she continued, “ that in one sense of the word we have done our part, and I would not for an instant suggest giving anything big if it were not for dear Julia. It will be such a help to the child to be properly introduced to people. And though the house is small and not particularly convenient for entertaining, it can be made to look well enough now that the drawing-room ceiling has been re-tinted.”

Craftiness, thy name is woman ! It was obvious to me now why Josephine had seemed

so eager to have that ceiling done over before we moved from the sea-side.

As it happened, however, I was feeling tolerably flush, by reason of a windfall which had left me with an extra thousand dollar bill. Somebody had told me to buy cotton. I had done so, and sold it a month later at a handsome profit, and I had been trying to make up my mind for a fortnight whether to spend the proceeds of the venture in a diamond crescent for Josephine or a fur overcoat for myself. Somehow I felt that it was money to be squandered rather than saved. Consequently I now remarked, with a sigh of resignation :

“Very well, dear ; give a party if you see fit.”

Josephine looked successively bewildered, radiant, and finally anxious.

“You know, Fred, that a party means more than two or three moulds of ice-cream with mixed cakes.”

Evidently she had expected a much more serious tussle, and wished to make sure that I realized what I was in for.

“Have a dozen moulds, then, if necessary.”

“You cannot give a party nowadays for nothing,” she added, with conscientious insistence.

“Everything costs more than it is worth nowadays,” I answered oracularly. “Give your party, Josephine, and I will pay the bills. Only,” I added, by way of a prospective brake on extravagance, “remember that we are not millionaires.”

“You are a dear, kind, good, generous duck,” she exclaimed, effusively, throwing her arms around my neck. “I will send for Sam Bangs to-morrow.”

Sam Bangs is a convenient friend of the family, a second cousin of mine, and rather a pal of Josephine's. The world at large christened him “Slam” Bangs early in life because of his rattling energy ; but contact with the world in question has toned down the rattle to a conventional key and left the energy unimpaired. He has led more Germans, and been an usher at a larger number of weddings and funerals than any man of his years in town, and is consequently a social authority.

Sam duly appeared in all the regalia of

evening dress and a chrysanthemum, and smiled benignly on the project. "I shall depend on you to help me make it a success," Josephine said to him with a supplicating air; and thereafter the pair was deep in consultation for at least half a dozen evenings during the next three weeks.

The married man whose wife is on the eve of giving a ball, is absolutely of no account, and colloquially speaking, his room is far more desirable than his company. He is the last person to whom anyone would think of referring the various knotty problems to be solved, and they are diverse. Josephine's throes over her invitation list was simply agonizing, and, as she herself informed me after all was over, her distress of mind was intensified by the consciousness that I was of no use whatever as an adviser. I was fortunate enough, however, to be allowed to remain within earshot of the arrangements, on the tacit understanding that I was on no account to ruffle the current of conversation with my oar.

Sam Bangs laid down many precepts for Josephine's guidance, but first and foremost he

impressed upon her the necessity of plenty of men. He declared that, no matter how elegant a party might be, or how admirably conducted, a scarcity of men would be the ruin of it; that a party where men were abundant was pretty sure to go off with snap, and that snap was of the essence of things where entertainments are concerned.

“But where are we to get the men?” anxiously inquired Josephine, who had Mrs. Willoughby Walton’s list, which she had borrowed, in one hand, and a pencil in the other. “I don’t know half of these.”

“You must invite everyone, whether you know them or not.”

“Certainly, if I know their fathers and mothers.”

“Then you will never have enough, Cousin Josephine. There is a large floating contingent of dancing men who are destitute of fathers and mothers in the conventional sense; but they, the sons, are the rank and file of every large party nowadays, and you have to ask them. Otherwise there is a dearth of partners and the girls have a stupid time.”

“What would they think of me if I should ask them without knowing them?”

“Most of them wouldn’t think of you at all; that’s the beauty of it. They would come and dance and eat supper, and dance again and then eat supper again, without bothering their heads about you in the least. They are quite used to it, I assure you. Five out of six would not know you or Miss Julia from Adam if they were to meet you the next day. Of course, if you were going to give a very small, select affair, you could pick and choose, but in a *tutti frutti* you must have men, even if you have to hire them.”

“Then why shouldn’t I give a small affair instead of a—a *tutti frutti*?” inquired my darling with a pathetic gasp as though she were a drowning woman snatching at a straw.

“In that case you would have to leave out half the people you do know, which might be embarrassing.”

“Indeed it would,” said Josephine, and for the next half-hour she endeavored to compute whether it would be more distressing to have to invite the rag, tag, and bob-tail as she

called it, or be compelled to leave out half her social acquaintance.

"Would it be possible, Cousin Sam?" she pleaded.

"To do what?"

"Give a small dance without offending people?"

"That depends on the number you feel obliged to ask."

"I made an impromptu calculation the other day," she answered, ruefully, "and I don't see how I can escape from inviting six hundred in any event—and that of course without the extra young men you mentioned."

"Forty couples are all this house will possibly accommodate with comfort for a german, Cousin Josephine, but you can invite any number of people to a jam."

"And there are forty-three buds alone without counting Julia," she groaned. "I had better go in for the jam and get it over."

"You can kill off everybody now, and another time it will be easier to give the smaller dance."

After the decision of this momentous question came the excruciating task of overhauling the invitation list. Incessantly one or the other would burst out with some such horrified exclamation, as "He died three years ago, strike him out," or "Mercy on us, I was nearly forgetting that Polly Flinders isn't Polly Flinders any longer." There was a constant bickering between them also on the score of admissibility. Sam, in the interest of the dancing phalanx, was in favor of applying the pruning-knife freely among the "ancient and honorables," as he called them, and on the other hand Josephine, from fear of giving offence, was disposed to include every grandmother and great-aunt in her social category. Three evenings were spent in this manner before the last letter in the alphabet was reached, and my darling was able to smile again. Even then it was a little ghost of a smile, accompanied by the disheartened utterance that she fully expected to discover, after the invitations had been issued, that she had omitted her dearest friends and made many mortal enemies.

When the invitation list was out of the way the parquet floor became Josephine's crowning concern. The fact that the drawing-room happened to have a parquet floor had been, as I subsequently discovered, a constant spur to her to give a party ever since our marriage. For what can equal for dancing a carefully oiled floor? What, indeed! And what is more detestable than one out of condition? Josephine fancied that she had merely to remove the rug and apply a little furniture polish to the surface of hers in order to render it a terpsichorean paradise. How often are our most confident expectations blighted! For a fortnight she was racked by the alternate consciousness that her paradise was so slippery as to be dangerous to life and limb, or so sticky as to dishearten the least exacting of waltzers. Hour after hour housemaids with cloths bundled about their feet, rubbed it with judiciously moistened mops, and hour after hour experienced furniture polishers treated it with lubricating liquids, until the house smelt like a combined chemist's and sign-painter's establishment; and even the willing Sam Bangs had

grown weary in pirouetting over it with Josephine in order to decide whether it was just right. When at last Sam pronounced solemnly that it was perfect, Josephine looked as though she would cry with rapture; but she restrained her tears until the following day, when she caught sight of me standing in the middle of it, fresh from the street in my muddy boots, as she graphically described the situation.

As for Sam Bangs, he was completely in his element; that is to say, he was in and out of our house half a dozen times in the course of every twenty-four hours—ringing the doorbell before breakfast, and as likely as not at night just when I was on the point of turning out the gas and thanking my lucky stars that I had seen the last of him for that day at least. The household was up in arms, and the house in the possession of dressmakers and small mechanics. The hall was full of camp-stools. One afternoon, when I chanced to return home earlier than usual, there was a scurrying exodus from my dressing-room of Julia in dishabille and two dressmakers, who shrieked as

they fled, like the squawking sheldrake of the lake. I had interrupted my sister-in-law in the process of being fitted to the waist of her new ball-dress. Afflicting days these for a married man ! Although Josephine explained that a cloth was thrown over the floor of my dressing-room every morning, and that the housemaid had explicit orders to tidy up as soon as the dressmakers had departed, I picked up a dozen needles and three score pins in the course of their stay, and trod the carpet in perpetual fear of lockjaw.

The eventful day arrived at last. Early in the afternoon Josephine introduced me to a caterer of predatory mien, who demanded the key of my wine-cellar and proceeded to supplement the dozens of champagne which were being iced in tubs with the few bottles of choice Madeira, brandy, and port which I had collected from time to time with a view to opening them when I and they had grown mellow with age. When I entered the drawing-room at ten o'clock, I felt some doubts as to whether Sam Bangs or I was the proprietor of the establishment. These vanished com-

pletely after he insisted on reopening the windows, which I had closed, on the plea that, unless the mercury were detained in close proximity to the freezing-point until the guests arrived, the heat would be unendurable later, a proposition which Josephine and Julia supported so vigorously that I turned up the collar of my dress-coat and abandoned the field to my rival. He was already attended by a corps of magnificent youths who were to officiate as ushers. Several of these did me the honor to exchange a few words with me, but the most of them ignored my presence, or rather tolerated it with much the same air of toplofty unconcern with which they put up with the presence of the waiters and the musicians—nuisances, so to speak, but under the circumstances not to be got rid of. Happening to filch a tinsel rose from the basket on the mantle-piece containing the favors for the german, intending to save it for little Winona, I quailed before the frosty gaze of one of these dragons of the ball-room, who informed me that they were not to be taken until later in the evening. Moreover I replaced it with

an apology so humble that he unbent himself so far as to add that, if everyone were to follow my example, the favors would be exhausted before the german began. Five minutes afterward I heard him inquire of Sam Bangs who that old cock was, and I cherish, among the few delightful memories of the evening, the sickly expression of his features consequent upon the answer of his chief.

In much the same fashion as the tide advances up a shingly beach, do the guests arrive at a large party. A preliminary straggler or two put in an appearance, then a batch of three or four ; there is a lull, followed by a file of stragglers, and more frequent batches ; another lull, and of a sudden a continuous stream which swells and subdivides until it loses itself in a seething, murmuring concourse which hurls itself upon the bewildered hostess and is sucked back by the undertow.

Dazed by innumerable greetings and handshakings, I merely try to keep steadily in mind Josephine's strict injunction that I am to look out for the girls who are left stranded without

a soul to speak to them, and to relieve men who have been too long in the society of any one woman. As I worm my way through the crowded rooms I feel myself to be a conglomeration of the good Samaritan and an amateur detective. From time to time an emissary recalls me to the side of Josephine to receive whispered instructions to restrain the children from displaying themselves at the head of the staircase in their nightgowns, or to caution the caterer not to let salt get into the ice-cream. She is nervous and excited, and informs me with delight three separate times that the Reverend Bradley Mason, our spiritual advisor, and Doctor Henry Meredith, the specialist on nervous diseases, are among our guests.

“ You know, Fred, that it is the rarest thing to see either of them at a party, and I consider it a great compliment that they should have made an exception in our favor.”

It seems as though every friend and acquaintance whom I possess has made an exception in our favor, for the rooms are perspiringly crowded. Mrs. Gregory Scott, and

Mrs. Willoughby Walton, and Mrs. Guy Sloane arrive later than ever, and their advent is scarcely less notable than a decade ago, when they were fresh and youthful as the half dozen younger married women threatening to usurp their places. Youths who are, figuratively speaking, babes in arms, dance attendance on them, and Mrs. Walton's bosom is banked with the same profusion of flowers. Mrs. Guy drops me a courtesy and bends upon me a glance of melancholy, yet tender reproach which seems to inquire why I have failed to visit her for three years. Is it verily three years since I have called upon her? I blush for the rapid flight of time. Another emissary touches my shoulder and emits the mandate that my wife is waiting for me. I find Josephine in a fever of nervous tension over the fact that supper has been ready for ten minutes, and that she has been unable to find me to tell me that I am to lead the way with Mrs. Cadwallader Kean.

"Why doesn't Sam Bangs lead the way?" I inquire, gravely. "He is running this thing."

My darling opens her eyes in bewildered astonishment at my pleasantry. Then, with a little toss of her head, which implies that she has no time to waste over such nonsense, she gives me a gentle push, saying:

“Don’t dawdle, Fred; there she is, standing exactly in the direction where I am looking.”

I hie me to the wrinkled sexagenarian in question. Her husband had been one of those admirably attractive men who manage to drink themselves to death early in life and yet leave behind them a lustre of fashionable importance which gilds their posterity. It is not easy to state in terms why Mrs. Cadwallader is entitled to precedence, yet everyone knows that she is, and she takes my arm as though she were accustomed to the attention. Our exit toward the supper-room is the signal for a general stampede thither. Young men and old men, like an army of black ants, infest the tables and struggle fiercely for hot bouillon, raw oysters, chicken-salad, lobster croquettes, filet of beef, champagne, ice-cream, rolls, napkins, and ice-water. I behold a Judge of the

Supreme Court foiled in an attempt to capture a remaining sweet-bread by a youth barely out of his teens, who is foraging for his rose-bud partner. Through a sea of black coats and jostling elbows and surging beards and mustaches I catch sight of our diminutive but beloved pastor wedged in between two rowing men from the University, who seem to be determined that he shall never reach shore with the plate of ice-cream which he is clutching like a vice. I notice, too, Dr. Meredith partaking freely of most of the articles of diet against which his professional fulminations are uttered. And ever and anon I am recalled to the side of my darling, who is beset by a hundred fears. Why are there not plenty of rolls? Where are the napkins? Why do the waiters neglect to offer Apollinaris water to the ladies in accordance with her positive orders! It is I who am in her service and at her beck and call now, for Sam has yielded to temptation and established himself with his *Dulcinea del Toboso* in the only cubby-hole in the house adapted for two.

Little by little the press diminishes, until

only the few who are fain to eat and drink in peace are left in the supper-room. I notice Gillespie Gore sampling my Madeira and pressing it upon the attention of discriminating pals. The musicians are tuning their instruments and a few people (thank goodness !) are going home. Josephine's parquet floor is overrun by a bevy of gilded youths contending for camp stools, and out of stormy chaos the german forms itself at last under the supervision of Sam, who has been dragged from his cubby-hole. Three hours of strenuous dancing follow, during which I flit restlessly from pillar to post, from the benches where the matrons are dozing with one eye open on their daughters to the supper-room where perpetual hot ducks and my Madeira still detain Gillespie Gore and company, and where the dancing men without mothers and fathers quaff goblets galore of champagne after each figure of the thirst-provoking dance. I am yearning to go to bed, and I recall the answer of the host in *Punch*, to whom the bored spirit at his side, leaning against the wall, whispered, " This is jolly stupid; I say, let's

go home.”—“ Would to heaven I could, but I can't, for it's my house ! ”

One o'clock, two o'clock, three o'clock in the morning, and now it is a quarter of four. I peep behind a curtain and ruminantly scan the glimmering east. At last the waltzers, who have grown more exuberant with every hour, show signs of cessation. Chaperones, exhausted in patience, rouse themselves from their somnolence and exercise authority over their charges. Mrs. Cadwallader Kean, drawing her old-lace shawl around her shoulders with dignified impressiveness, announces that it is time for her daughter to go home. Even Sam, the inexhaustible and inextinguishable, admits that the german is at an end, and that there is to be only one final polka to wind up with.

Oh, the joy and rapture of that last polka ! Maidens on the point of departure tear themselves free from the maternal grasp at the invitation of the first partner who offers his hand and fall into the delicious rhythm of the swinging quickstep, and the old war-horses who have been looking forward to it all the

evening, fling themselves into the maddening whirl with almost the abandon of the cancan. Who can be indifferent to plenty of room and a perfect floor at four o'clock in the morning when you are conscious that in five minutes more all will be over and you will be face to face with the cold, pale morn and reproachful stars? There is a dash and a go to it which carries away the least frivolous and the least elastic, so that they speed round with the verve and exaltation of twenty-one. There are just enough remaining, and they the cream of the dancers. The gayety and enthusiasm of the rout recall from the supper-room the last of the old stagers and lure from the cubby-hole Mrs. Gregory Scott and the boy of nineteen who is her favorite slave at the moment. It is the fag end of the evening, the lees of the entertainment by means of which another of the rose-bud garden of girls has been introduced to the great world. She, dear child, the sweet sister-in-law of the house, is spinning radiantly round the room with her hand resting on the shoulder of one of the youths without parents, who has claimed her for this

last polka of all. My feet beat time and my pulses respond to the well-remembered measure, and suddenly in an acme of transport I pounce upon and possess myself of Josephine and precipitate her into the madcap whirl. Fast and faster we revolve, rejoicing in our ecstasy and fearful at every seeming pause in the music that the end has come. It is demoniac, but glorious. And all at once, at the inspiration of Mrs. Willoughby Walton, who is dancing madly with Sam Bangs, everyone begins to chant with delirious voices the air and cadence of the entrancing polka. The ecstasy is at its height; the madness of the madcaps is at the climax. On and on, round and round, faster and faster, we spin, and then of a sudden the music throbs and bounds, rises and screeches, vibrates wildly, falls and ceases; the melody from half a hundred throats expires in a groan of regret, and Josephine's party is over.





x

THE lady in the house across the way, the mother of the seven girls, is dead. A week ago she was carried to the cemetery and her husband has begun life again in a sable hat and gloves. He walks bravely arm in arm with the eldest of his tall daughters, with one of the others on either side. I turn away from the window with a lump in my throat. My heart bleeds for him, and I cannot help thinking that it might have been Josephine.

We look into each other's eyes, conscious of the same thought. Sooner or later death, the inevitable, will come to rob me of her or her of me. The spinster falls asleep and all is over. She is respectfully mourned; her little

charities cease, her account with her boarding-house keeper is closed, and her last instructions regarding her parrot are respected. But when a wife and mother dies all nature sobs.

And yet men marry again; men and women also. One of my great-grandfathers took unto himself four wives, and Josephine's maternal grandmother had three husbands. Josephine, who knows Robert Browning's "Any Wife to Any Husband" by rote, pretends that if she were to be taken away I would marry again, but I know she is no less sure in her secret soul that I would remain a widower to the end than she is sure of being faithful herself in case I should be the first to go. We have often pondered why it is that the one who is left behind to mourn can so quickly stifle the old love. To be sure, we have been told that in heaven there will be no marrying or giving in marriage, but, as Josephine says, this would scarcely reconcile the woman who has gone before in the faith of an everlasting love to sharing it with another. Nevertheless here is the example of her grand-

mother with three husbands and my great-grandfather with his four wives staring us in the face. Are we to argue that our ancestors loved less truly and deeply than we ?

Josephine insists that this is so, and I am disposed to agree with her. If, indeed, we are to live again on the farther side of the tomb, what will it profit us unless we can see and know those whom we have loved here ? Life without consciousness of this world's associations would be to all intents and purposes annihilation. If I am to be separated forever from Josephine by death, what boots it to me whether I shall rise at the last trump a winged angel with the power of worship, or be resolved into the elemental clod from which my bones were fashioned ?

“And yet,” said Josephine to me one day when we were discussing the matter, as we occasionally do, “supposing I had died when the children were mere tots, and you had been left to struggle through life alone, it would really have been the most sensible thing, after all, for you to marry again, if only to provide my darlings with a mother. It would have

been frightfully lonely for you, Fred ; you would never have been able to stand it. But if I had known what was going on I could never have forgiven you—never. I should have hated you and her. You are mine for eternity, and I wish the whole of you or none at all.”

The mystery of mysteries, death ! In the twinkling of an eye we shall cease to rise, and dress, and eat, and walk, and sleep, and we shall be laid in the ground where the bones of our ancestors lie wrestling with decay. It may be that one of us will be called to-morrow, and, like the wife and mother across the way, leave the other to walk alone ; and it may be that we shall walk side by side until we are old, and wrinkled, and bald, and paralysis or cancer carries us off within six months of each other. Yet not for a single moment are we secure from the touch of the great destroyer, who may to-day divide our hearts as with a shear. The priest kneeling at the altar with his face to the sky smiles at death ; he knows not the terror of the thought which haunts us because we are so happy.

Many a time, when our thoughts have this way tended, have we endeavored to forecast the topography of the future state, undaunted by the fact that the wisest men and women of past generations, both married and single, have bent their wits upon the problem in vain. Yet here we encounter some progress, for even Josephine, with her predilection for magnificent effects, has ceased to contend that the immortal spirit is likely to be trammelled by pearly gates and the manipulation of a harp. Similarly, we put aside as no longer germane to the issue the quandary, which harassed our ancestors, as to how the amplitude of the heavens will afford seating capacities for the myriad souls whom a previous condition of rectitude has entitled to enter grace; an architectural feat calculated to palsy the imagination even of those enthusiasts who insist that the huge population of India's coral strand, to say nothing of the sparse aborigines of Greenland's icy mountains, are to be omitted from the computation. In spite, too, of the fulminations of a certain portion of the clergy, we are unable to screw our convictions up to a belief in the

traditional hell which was alike the terror and the solace of bygone generations. We are oppressed by the fear neither of a bottomless pit nor of interminable fires of brimstone. A willingness to torture seems to us too utterly inconsistent with the attributes of the divinity who brings to pass the sunsets and inspires the human soul with the sublimities of poetry and art.

"It would be immensely interesting, though," said Josephine one day, "if we only could catch just a little glimpse of the future. I feel as you do, Fred, that the idea of eternal torment is old-fashioned, and that very few really believe in it, whatever they may say with their lips ; but, on the other hand, I can't help feeling that there will be some sort of distinction between the sheep and the goats, and that people who have been horribly wicked will not be quite on a par with the righteous."

"I will admit," said I, "that there was a certain gorgeous satisfaction for our ancestors in the old hope that those who did not toe the mark would be held up to a sulphurous blaze of fiery pitchforks, and I can almost envy the

complacency of the poor suffering souls to-day who are being buoyed through life by the fervent expectation that the people who have been well to do and happy in the present world will be tormented in the next in order to make things even, and that they themselves will be proportionately indemnified for their terrestrial misery."

"And the trouble is, Fred, that we who believe that God is love, and consequently dismiss the old conceits as too terrible, just as we no longer burn folk as witches and hang them for petty larceny, are left without the comfort of a definite theory on the subject of what will happen to other people, and are also unable to entertain physical fears on our own account. It seems to me that there ought to be a separate place in the other world for pretty good people, those who are neither saintly on the one hand, nor criminals nor detestably selfish or malicious on the other. It would have to be much the largest place, for after all we are most of us pretty good. There are a few saints and a good many miserable sinners, but the most of the people we know are pretty good."

“ And would you limit your limbo to people we know, my dear ? ” I inquired. “ Are you canvassing in the interest of a celestial four hundred ? ”

“ Don’t be blasphemous, Fred. It would necessarily include the greater portion of the people we know, because the greater portion of the people we know are of just that kind, people whose faults, though numerous enough and discouraging enough, as we are painfully aware in our own cases, don’t seem exactly to merit everlasting torture. Just think how many people there are in the world like you and me, who would be utterly incapable of committing a murder, or robbing a bank, or putting sand in sugar, or telling downright lies, or wantonly slandering their neighbors ; people who have courteous manners, and tempers tolerably under control, and a decided sympathy with culture, and a disposition to contribute their mites to the cause of philanthropy ; people who would cut their right hands off rather than dispute a will because they hadn’t received what they expected, or live beyond their incomes, or violate a confi-

dence ; people who are not geniuses and will never set the world afire, and who, though they don't understand exactly why they have been created, wish to live as long as possible and have not the least desire to die, and who go on from year to year without seeming to accomplish very much, and yet trying—trying—trying to understand what God expects of them. For we do try, don't we, Fred ? ”

“ Indeed you do, my dear. The only trouble is that, though I might possibly be included in the category of the pretty good, you would rank as a saint.”

“ Which only shows how little you really know me,” she answered, with a sigh. “ Unfortunately, the recording angel sees me with very different eyes, and knows that I am far from saintly.” My darling bent her glance upon space for a moment with a dejected little air, as though she were appalled by the realization of her imperfection, then she turned to me and said, “ Of course anyone would be glad to be a saint ; and undoubtedly, if one were a saint, one would like especially to be with saintly people ; but the most depress-

ing thing of all in a certain way is that the society of the pretty good people is so attractive to me, that I am confident I should be very miserable if I were to be separated from them altogether."

"From your own true love, for instance?"

"Yes, from my own true love, alas! For I am forced to admit, Fred, that, though you are adorable at times, you are only pretty good." She added, as she threw her arms around my neck, "Only think how terrible it would be for me if you *were* a saint and I so full of shortcomings!"

A place hereafter for pretty good people! I have often recalled since that notion of Josephine's as an eminently pertinent suggestion. Lord Bacon well said that "he that hath wife and children hath given hostages to fortune, for they are impediments to great enterprises either of virtue or of mischief." The married man who is chary of drinking tea from his saucer and ambitious to send his sons to college, is unapt to expose himself to obloquy for the sake of his convictions, nor is his wife fain to become a St. Theresa. Less likely, on

the other hand, is either to stoop to flagrant vices. As I have already specified, I renounced on the day I wedded Josephine even the hope of stopping a runaway horse, and I am free to admit that I dismissed forever at the same time a sneaking intention of presuming on my hitherto unblemished reputation to become some day a foot-pad in disguise. What, pray, is there to prevent Sam Bangs, for instance, I was going to say—but even he has bowed his neck at last to the matrimonial yoke at the behest of the Dulcinea with whom he retired to the cubby-hole at Josephine's party ; so let me invoke for my argument the traditional Tom, Dick, and Harry of fiction, and ask again what is there to prevent any of these single gentlemen from putting Paris green in the porridge of his dearest foe, or from hieing to the North Pole in the cause of glacial science? The world lies open before them. They are free to become hardened villains of the deepest dye, or benefactors of their day and generation. But for Josephine and for me the path of life is straight and narrow. Has not my darling, with her own fair

hands, daily to butter rolls for the little ones to take to school, to make sure that the buttons which support their gallowsses are not lacking, and to keep a watchful eye on the length of their hair? Have I not in my turn to remember to bring home the money for that everlasting sewing-woman, whether I have earned it or not, and to foster a nostril perpetually on the scent of sewer-gas?

“Where, O where are the visions of morning
Fresh as the dews of our prime?
Gone like tenants who quit without warning
Down the back entry of time.”

“And have you ever thought, Fred,” said Josephine to me one day, “that we suddenly awake at forty and realize that we are just the sort of people we intended not to be? I for one—and I am very sure that you once felt the same—cherished such glorious visions and plans as a girl of what I was going to make of my life, and yet here I am living along just like everybody else, bringing up children, and going to kettledrums, and taking a spasmodic interest in the arrangement of tenement-houses, and planning for winter and summer clothes,

no better, and I dare say no worse, than the most of my neighbors."

"*Eppur si muove*," I murmured encouragingly.

"I could have told once what that meant," said she, with a mournful smile. "I used to know quite a little Italian."

" 'And still it moves,' the world moves. It was Galileo who made the remark under circumstances even more depressing than ours," I answered. "There is a certain comfort in the reflection that we pretty good people have very different ideas from the pretty good people who lived before we were born. As you said the other day, we no longer burn witches, and yet even the people who passed for saints two centuries ago took a hand in that. Perhaps with the same ratio of improvement we shall, in another two hundred years, cease to be at the mercy of the reporter, the saleslady, and the political striker, I flatter myself that we are a little more liberal, a little truer-hearted, a little wiser than our progenitors, just as our children are likely to be an improvement on us if pretty good people are not swept away

in the deluge of democracy. How interesting it would be if we could take a peep ahead and know what the world will be doing two hundred years hence ; or half a century even ! Think of it, my dear, pretty good people will probably be flying and doing all sorts of amazing things which will make our boasted progress seem a mere puppet show," I added, as I drew my darling's head down upon my shoulder and held her closely.

"Fancy," said Josephine, "being able to skim like a bird ! It would be glorious, wouldn't it ? Perhaps the dear children will live to cross the ocean on a genuine air-tamer." She was silent for a few moments, lost in rapt reflection, then looking up into my face with wistful tenderness, she whispered,

"I only hope, Fred, that they will be as happy as we have been."

THE END





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